



# Unsustainable Livelihood: An Intergenerational Mobility Of Cycle Rickshaw Pullers of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

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## ABSTRACT

“Cycle Rickshaw” is a very common and cheapest mode of transport for short distance travel in the India. Rickshaw serves as modest upward mobility for the people who come from village to city just for a simple cause, feed the bellies of their family members even once a day. The activity of rickshaw pullers depicts an unsustainable livelihood. The intergenerational mobility of the family members of rickshaw pullers is confined to very little schooling and bleak range of job opportunities. Gorakhpur is a small district in the Uttar Pradesh state of India. The rickshaw pullers of the city serve from a major drawback that is lack of parking space, disrespect from the local people and the cops, and importantly an unstable family conditions. The Gorakhpur Railway Station serves as the one and only authorized parking area in the entire city for the rickshaw pullers to park their vehicles. The study was conducted to enlighten the socio-economic conditions of rickshaw pullers of Gorakhpur with the aim that questions-why the city having the longest railway platform in India has only one parking space for rickshaw, the family conditions of rickshaw pullers, earnings per day, hours spent in the day to pull the rickshaw. Primary data was collected through field survey.

Keywords: Cycle rickshaw pullers, poverty, family, unsustainable livelihood, parking space, lack of support, corrupted authorities

## INTRODUCTION

India has conceded an incredible advancement in varies sections of economy since many decades. However, the benefits acquired could not seep to the lower branch public like Rickshaw pullers. Though, varied strategies have been drafted and implemented timely to upgrade the economic status of rickshaw pullers, but their conditions are still unsatisfactory. The word rickshaw is derived from the Japanese word ‘jinrikisha’, which means human-powered vehicle. We call them rickshaw-puller because they pull rickshaw and it is their occupation. Beforehand, there were only hand-drawn rickshaws where the person had to pull the rickshaw with their

hands. Now we find cycle-rickshaws. Hauling a cycle-rickshaw is requires less physical labor than pulling a hand rickshaw.



Figure I: Satellite view of Gorakhpur Railway station

‘Gorakhpur’ is a district in Uttar Pradesh, India and it has only one railway station (figure I, red shaded part), probably having the longest railway platform in India, where you can find a hub of rickshaw pullers, as it is the one and only authorized rickshaw stand. The Rickshaw pullers of Gorakhpur suffer from many problems that need attention. Firstly, the rickshaw pullers come from a very poor economical family background with farming being the only source of earning. They are even very much consistent with the chronic poverty. Secondly, the skill of rickshaw pulling provides the route for the modest upward mobility of the poor and needy that comes to city to earn the penny which can feed their families even once a day a meal in healthy manner. Thirdly, the rickshaw pullers are very much susceptible to the series of health issues. Downgrading health conditions added upon with health shocks and negligence due to lucre issues degrade their pace of upward mobility. Fourthly, the rickshaw pullers lead a very unsustainable livelihood. Fifthly, due to intergenerational mobility of the cycle rickshaw pullers, their family members lack proper schooling and have bleak range for occupational selections for their children.

Most of them are unemployed, illiterate, face unhygienic health conditions and discrimination regarding redistribution of available assets and resources frequently. A big segment of these rickshaw pullers are migrated from rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Gorakhpur for earning livelihood for their family. But, due to lack of cash, formal education, practical industrial and field skills and importantly hope, they came to the field of rickshaw pulling. It is a fact that now pulling rickshaw has become a common mode of income and employment amongst the rural migrants. Apart from all the problems faced by the rickshaw puller, one of the major mentioned problems that every rickshaw pullers was facing was the lack of support by higher authorities and corruption by policemen. The rickshaw pullers are not allowed to purchase their own rickshaw, so they have to take the rickshaw on rent from rickshaw owners (called “*Dehadi*<sup>1</sup>” system). Also pressure by policeman that if they want to run and stand their rickshaw near railway station, they have to give “*Commission*<sup>2</sup>”.

<sup>1</sup> *Dehadi*: Giving rent to the owner for borrowing their things

<sup>2</sup> *Commission*: Extortion money

## METHODOLOGY

The entire study is based on the primary data which was collected during the surveys with rickshaw pullers of Gorakhpur. On the basis of stratified random sampling, one hundred and fifty rickshaw pullers were selected and interviewed randomly for detailed information regarding their financial background and socio-economic status in the society. They basically belong to the outskirts of Gorakhpur and a plenty of them belonged to the state of Bihar. The Gorakhpur Railway Station serves as the only authorized rickshaw stand in the district spread over the area of 5484 kms<sup>2</sup>. They were surveyed with the questionnaire containing a list of selected questions. The collected data from the questionnaire and the data from the stories of rickshaw pullers were analyzed and tabulated with the help of basic statistical technique (see result section) and proper statistical analyses were drawn for all rickshaw pullers.

## RESULTS

### ▪ Rickshaw pullers according to their age group

From the list of rickshaw pullers surveyed, maximum number of rickshaw pullers belonged to the age group of 25-40 years while the minimum numbers of them lie under the category of 50-65 years. Hence this depicts that majority of the youth who belong to lower class do not even have the 3 basic necessities i.e. Food, Cloth and House and hence they drive rickshaw to earn a living while on the other hand the rickshaw pullers who aged more than 50 years are also indulged in this profession and find it difficult to feed their family when at this age they should rest and spend time with their loved ones (figure II).



Figure II: Percentage of rickshaw pullers according to their age group

### ▪ Dependent family members on the income of one rickshaw pullers

More than 20% of rickshaw pullers have 12-14 dependent family members whom a single member feeds. Hence, this suggests that it becomes very difficult for a single person to feed 12-14 members and solely on the earning of rickshaw pulling i.e. Rs. 150 to Rs. 250 per day which is very less to survive in this costly age (figure III).

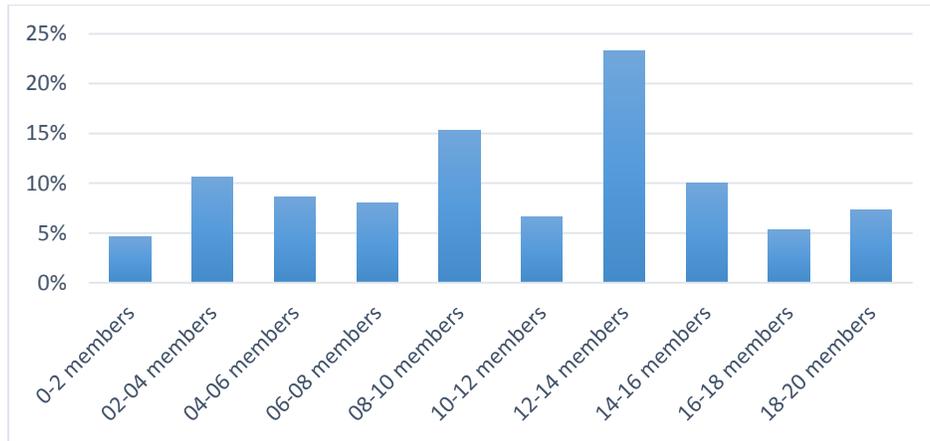


Figure III: Number of dependent family members on the income of one rickshaw puller

▪ **Average working hours per day of rickshaw puller**

More than 50% of the rickshaw pullers surveyed works for more than 10 hours a day to earn a better livelihood. This shows that the rickshaw pullers put their every bit of effort to arrange “*do waqt ki roti*”<sup>3</sup> for their family after much of tiring physical labor (figure IV).

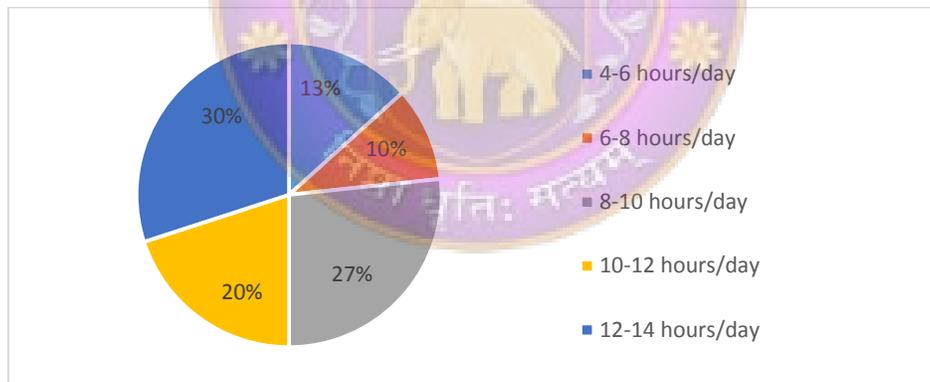


Figure IV: Average number of hours rickshaw pullers work in a day

▪ **Average earning of a rickshaw puller per day**

Less than 20% of the rickshaw pullers have their daily income ranging from Rs.300 – Rs.450 per day while the remaining can manage to earn Rs.150 – Rs.250. This means that in present time earning such a minimal amount to survive and arrange the food for the family is

<sup>3</sup> *Do waqt ki roti*: Two times of meal

something very drastic and sometimes they end their day by just drinking water and filling their empty stomach (figure V).



Figure V: Earning of rickshaw pullers in a day

- **Rent of a rickshaw per day paid by rickshaw pullers**

More than 25% of rickshaw pullers have to pay Rs.50 per day to hire the rickshaw while only 6% of rickshaw pullers have their own rickshaw. Hence, to save the earning after paying the rent and commission to the police becomes a challenging task for them as they have to earn a living in the balance amount too (figure VI).

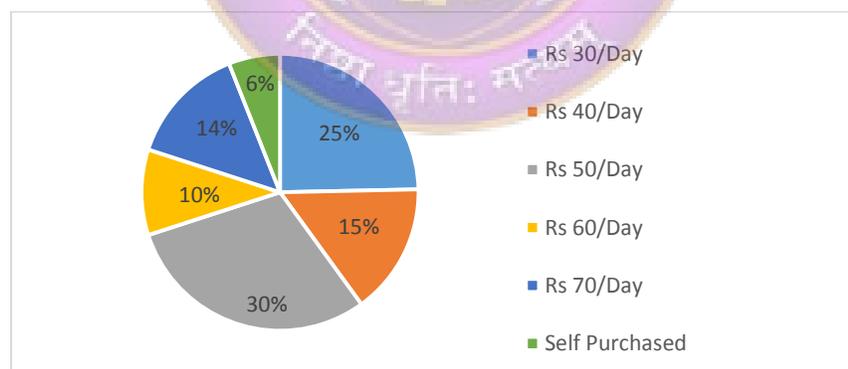


Figure VI: Rickshaw rent paid per day by rickshaw pullers

- **Rickshaw Pullers according to their birth-place**

The people involved in rickshaw pulling are considered extremely discredited portion of society. These people arrived in Gorakhpur to earn a livelihood. Table I highlights that majority of rickshaw pullers (77%) were immigrated from various regions of our country; only 23% were recorded as local, being the native of the city itself. More than half (51%) arrived from different districts of the Uttar Pradesh state itself while 12% were the native of

Bihar. It was noticed during our field survey that more than three-fourth of the migrants were rural-marginal agricultural laborers or farmers who have arrived from near-by districts where opportunities of earning were even lesser than Gorakhpur.

Table I: Rickshaw Pullers according to their birth place

Native place of rickshaw puller	Percentage of rickshaw pullers
Local resident	23%
Migrated	77%
a. Within own district	14%
b. Neighboring district	46%
c. Distant of district	05%
d. Different states	12%

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▪ **Rickshaw Pullers according to their previous occupation**

The previous occupation of any rickshaw pullers implies somehow the most important indications of the socio-economic condition of the rickshaw pullers. Figure VII signifies that 20% of them were agricultural laborers, farmers being (11%), non-workers were (22%), construction laborers being (13%), fruit/vegetable hawkers (5%), local industry workers (11%), sweepers (5%), hotel-restaurant workers (8%) and 5% were involved in other works. The inclusion of agricultural laborers was greater as a reason of non-availability of work for all the seasons of the year. However, amongst the rickshaw pullers only, 20% of them were engaged previously as farmers; and because of less income, overcrowding, high labor cost and lesser gain forced them to engage themselves in the business of rickshaw pulling.

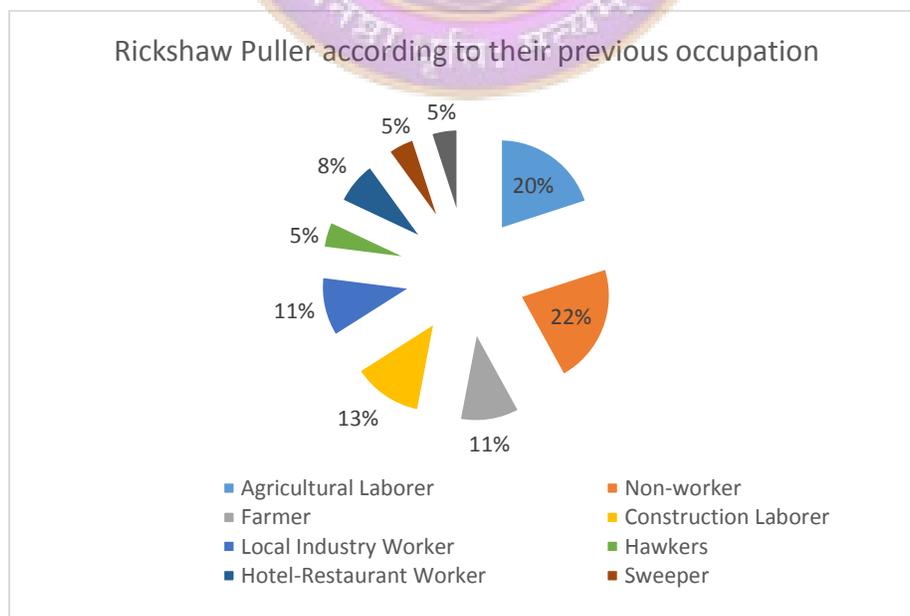


Figure VII: Rickshaw Pullers according to their previous occupation

The other reasons for getting into the profession were firstly, hand-to-hand cash to attract the people to do this physically labored job secondly, rickshaw pulling need no prior skill while the high machinery and mechanization was involved in the cottage and small scale industries has left very bleak scope for unskilled workers. A considerable proportion of rickshaw pullers were previously vegetable/fruit hawkers but due to some bad habits such as gambling, drug addiction and alcoholic and in some cases diseases and health issues among family members resulted as money loss consequently, they adopted for the profession of pulling cycle rickshaw.

- **Rickshaw pullers according to their religion**

In India, religion plays an important and very crucial factor as far as the socio-economic condition of such community is put under consideration because almost all the decisions of a family or person belonging to a backward community are determined by the religion factor. Figure VIII showcases that nearly 57.10% were followers of the Hindu religion while 40% rickshaw pullers belonged to the Muslim community. Moreover, very bleak proportion (02.09%) was detected of Christian religion in rickshaw pulling service. High involvement of Hindu shows the poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in the Gorakhpur region.

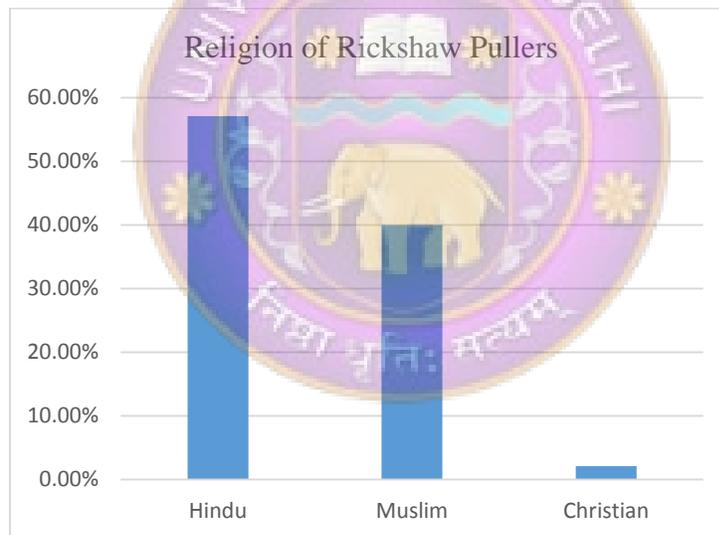


Figure VIII: Rickshaw Pullers according to their religion

- **Rickshaw pullers according to their caste**

The Indian Caste System, with its social boundations and societal classifications continues to put its major impact on the Indian social set. This wholesome system is generally identified within the people following Hindu as their religion, is also very common amongst Christians and Muslims too. It is caste only that inextricably inter-linked to proxy settings of social-economic status of the rickshaw pullers. Figure IX reveals that the schedule caste contributes a total of 17%, while people from backward castes constitute the maximum of 76% amongst the rickshaw pullers, followed by general category being only 7%. The rickshaw pullers

belonging to the backward caste, majority of them were found to be Hindu. They were in severe pathetic conditions and more miserable than that of rickshaw pullers belonging to the schedule caste.

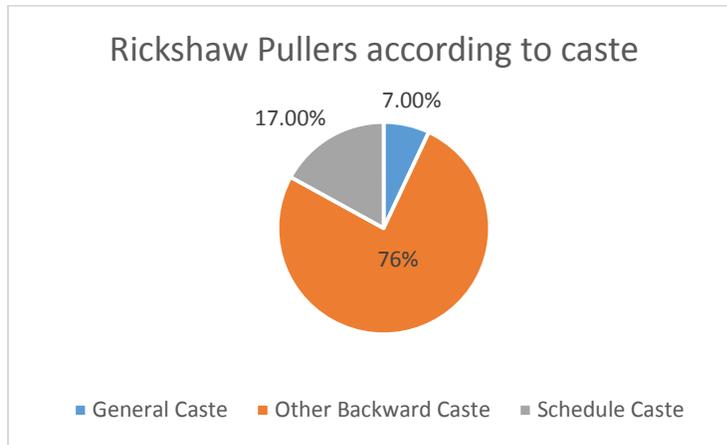


Figure IX: Rickshaw Pullers according to their caste

- **Rickshaw pullers according to their marital status**

Marriage somehow shows the stability and reliability of one's personal and social life. Figure X signifies the composition of rickshaw pullers who were married was 73%, in addition to it were unmarried (23%) followed by divorced/widower (4%). Marriage/Family is importantly one of the crucial pull factors that forces unskilled/non-workers to satisfy and fulfill the daily needs and the basic necessities of their parents, children and wife as rickshaw pulling provides most easy hand-to-hand cash transfer. However, a very small portion of them were severely forced to be bachelor as they left their family, wife and little kids at their native places and moved onto a completely different place to earn. Due to very poor socio-economic conditions and to earn a livelihood, a large proportion of population was left single; they also left their villages and states to earn money and fill their stomach even twice a day.

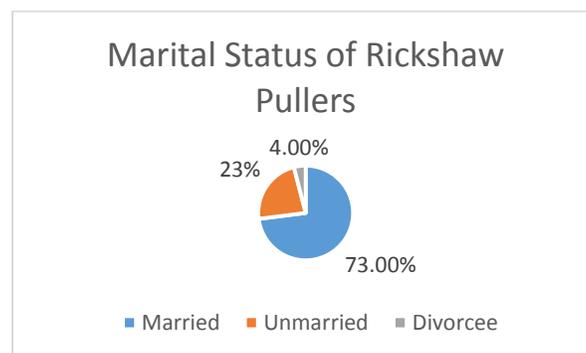
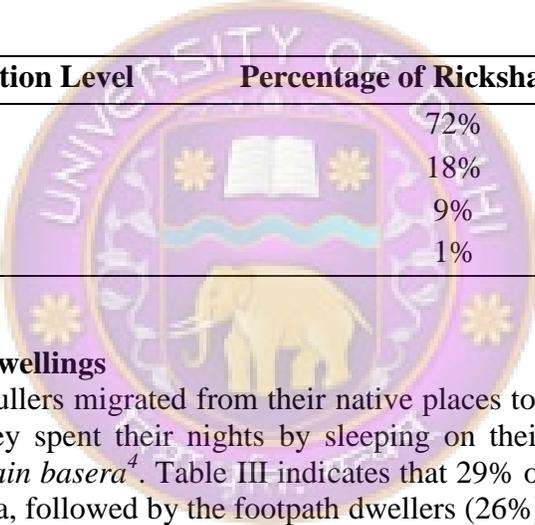


Figure X: Rickshaw Pullers according to their marital status

- **Rickshaw pullers according to their level of education**

Any person's level of education is an indication of amount of social upliftment. Table II explains that being illiterate was very familiar and common amongst the community of rickshaw pullers (72%). Those who were literate (28%), most of them received only primary or higher primary level of education or were dropouts due to financial problems. It was noticed that the rickshaw pullers were extremely old-fashioned and backward considering educational development. It was due to the reasons of lack of proper facilities and accessibility, lower income of members of family, severe poverty, and the most prevailed thinking about education as it is regarded as only the expense of money on something which resulted into something unfruitful.

Table II: Rickshaw Pullers according to the level of education



Education Level	Percentage of Rickshaw Pullers
Illiterate	72%
Primary	18%
Secondary	9%
High School	1%

- **Rickshaw pullers by dwellings**

Most of the rickshaw pullers migrated from their native places to earn a livelihood and were homeless, however, they spent their nights by sleeping on their rickshaw or footpaths or railways platforms or *rain basera*<sup>4</sup>. Table III indicates that 29% of the rickshaw pullers were waking up in rain basera, followed by the footpath dwellers (26%), having own house (12%), Jhuggie<sup>5</sup>/slum dwellers (12%), living on own rickshaw (19%) while only 2% of rickshaw pullers could afford for rented houses. The garages, Jhuggies/slums, others houses lacked toilet and proper hygienic sanitation facilities and even had no water supply facility.

Table III: Rickshaw Pullers according to their dwelling

Nature of Dwelling	Percentage of Rickshaw Puller
Rented	2%
Jhuggies/Slums	12%
Rain Basera	29%
Footpath Dwellers	26%
Own Rickshaw	19%

<sup>4</sup> Rain basera – A small shed created by Government for the homeless to spend their night for free of cost

<sup>5</sup> Jhuggie – A small hut

Own House	12%
a. Pakka <sup>6</sup>	02%
b. Semi Pakka	05%
c. Hut	05%

▪ **Rickshaw pullers according to their amenities and facilities**

Table IV, highlights the distribution of facilities available at the dwelling of rickshaw pullers

Table IV: Distribution of facilities in rickshaw puller's dwelling

Facilities provided to rickshaw pullers	Percentage of rickshaw pullers
Drinking Water Facility	
a. Government Taps	11%
b. Government Hand Pumps	63%
c. Private Pumps	26%
Distance from the source of drinking water	
a. Within premises	25%
b. Upto 50 meters	51%
c. 51 meters to 100 meters	10%
d. Greater than 100 meters	14%
Types of toilets(latrines)	
a. Seat/Service/Flush	37%
b. None(in night soil)	63%

Table IV shows a tabular description of basic governmental facilities and civil amenities provided, 26% of the population of rickshaw pullers received water supply from their own hand pumps while the rest 74% were totally dependent on municipality provided water taps or hand pumps to fetch water. 63% rickshaw pullers used open spaces or night soil to defecate as they had no latrine and toilet facilities in their houses or dwelling places. It was recorded during our field survey that even after hard physical labor of rickshaw pulling, almost all of the rickshaw pulling community have to spend their lives without proper hygiene and meal diets at their dwellings where the facilities provided were very poor.

<sup>6</sup> Pakka – Cemented House

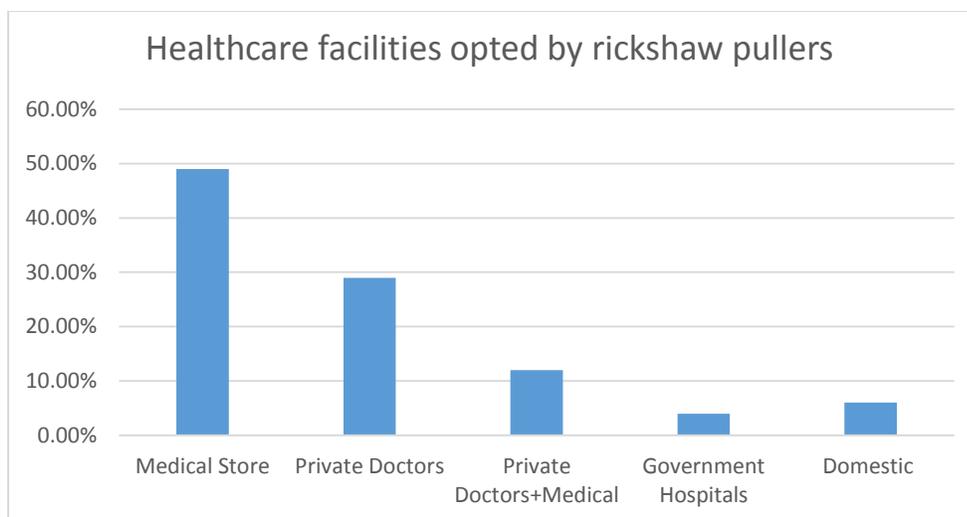


Figure XI: Healthcare facilities opted by rickshaw pullers

They were severely suffering with varied health issues, minor problems, i.e. cold and cough, high fever, complete body pain, joint pains and different chronic disease. They purchased their medicines from the local medical stores (47%) even without consulting the doctor or any medical physician. As they had very poor earning, and the consultation timings of the doctors and their earning hours were almost same that was why they preferred to go during their free hours or the evening time when the rush was less, to take a cheaper medicines either from the local medical shops or poor and below-standard private clinics for improving their health.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Daily basis income and quick engagement in work attract a number of people to join this profession. A wide range of rickshaw pullers were rural-immigrants who arrived from the adjacent district discarding their previous occupation they were involved in. They all are illiterate due to low income, family background and poverty. Most of the rickshaw pullers are in this occupation for more than 25 years so they are mostly in the age group of 30's and 40's. On an average every rickshaw puller has 6 dependents. Most of the rickshaw pullers pull the rickshaw for more than 10 hours daily then, their earning is in between 150-250 per day. On an average every rickshaw pullers have to pay Rs.50 per day as rent to his rickshaw owner. There is lack of support to them by higher authorities. The policemen at railway station are too much corrupted. In the fast growing era of mechanization, the fares allotted on the grounds of distance of travel still remains non-updated according to growing "mehengaai"<sup>7</sup>. Inactive rickshaw union made the condition of rickshaw pullers from bad to worst. Regarding their condition some recommendations are incorporated as quick remedial measures for their improvement.

<sup>7</sup> Mehengaai – Increasing rates of commodities according to time

- **Increase in fare:** Rickshaw pullers bear the extreme burden to carry the people and the luggage, and comparing the physical labor done by them, the income which they earn is very-very less if we talk in with reference with the current scenario of economy and increasing prices of commodities. It becomes very harsh and painful for them to arrange even meal for themselves even twice a day. Thus their livelihood is severely affected and hence they are unable to run their families in a healthy manner. In the situations like emergencies they are unable to give financial support to their families too and face emotional problems. Hence, the government should decide fare on grounds of *i) Number of people travelling ii) Distance between the places iii) Weather Conditions(if any)*. And timely the local/state government should revise the fares on a regular basis too.
- **Buying personal Rickshaws:** There are about 10,000 rickshaw pullers in Gorakhpur city but majority of them do not own their rickshaws. They hire them from rickshaw owners after paying just Rs.40/- per day and Rs. 50/- for a day. Thus their daily income is very less. Hence, there should be the flexibility that those who want to buy their own rickshaw can do so and should not be forced to hire the rickshaw from the garage owners if they have their own rickshaws.
- **Medical Facilities:** The rickshaw pullers do a very hard manual labor on daily basis and travel almost about 40 – 50 km per day. Thus there is a possibility of getting joint pain, chest pain back pain and may come across some physical injuries. Some of the rickshaw pullers are also staying in a hazardous place as they could not afford hygienic places and having frequent sickness and other problems frequently. Thus the government should provide them the medical facilities and medications at very low cost as they could afford them and get themselves and their family treated and cured. Also the government hospitals should organize free health checkups on special days like, Red Cross Day, AIDS Day and National Health Day etc. and provide them tips for improving their health.
- **Providing Respect:** The life of rickshaw pullers in itself is very painful. They have bundle amount of problems revolving around them and above it when the customer does not treat the rickshaw puller with respect and may physically or verbally abuse him for small amount of money or any other reason (maybe), the rickshaw puller could not do anything because he being a person of lower class, the general public will not trust him. Why we forget that it is them who are not doing a job or profession, they are doing a service to mankind. If they stop working even for a day, there would be a giant chaos created in the city. Hence we should respect everyone irrespective of his/her age, caste, profession or religion, because everybody out there is working hard to earn a living for their family.
- **Building an Identity:** The rickshaw pullers are coming from very vulnerable and defamed sections of the society, marginalized and migrated from their villages, districts and states to urban areas in search of some kind of employment labor and earn a livelihood. So they do not have any kind of identity in urban areas. They do not have voter card, ration card, bank account or the labor card. Thus they are unable to access social welfare provisions and get benefits from different government schemes. Hence the governmental organizations should organize free camps by hiring the volunteers where rickshaw pullers can get themselves

registered and get their identity cards build up in an easy manner and access facilities provided by the government.

- **Increasing Rickshaw Stands:** Gorakhpur, a city feeding around 10,000 rickshaw pullers has only one authorized rickshaw stand and that too at “Gorakhpur Railway Station”. The governmental bodies should provide their part of fund in building at least handsome amount of rickshaw stands so that no rickshaw puller should find it difficult to place its rickshaw at government authorized stands with proper sheds and greenery as it will serve in terms of beautification of city as well as protect them in summer and rainy seasons too.
- **Local Policeman must be corruption-free for rickshaw pullers:** The local policeman at the railway stands also ask for money from the rickshaw pullers. Though it is almost impossible to imagine the local policeman to be corruption free. But at least they should not ask for money from the poor rickshaw pullers as they themselves earn a very small amount of money and after giving the money to the garage owners they are left with only to fill their bellies. Hence, a softer heart should be kept for this section of society which is giving service to mankind.
- **Awareness about the Social Welfare Provisions and Social Security Schemes:** Most of the rickshaw pullers are not aware about the social welfare and social security schemes as most of them are illiterate. They are not having insurance and are unable to receive any kind of financial help from the government. Hence the government insurance companies should organize free camps and explain them the merits and demerits of insurance and security schemes and how can they secure the future of their children and family. And if required, they should register them in real time those who are interested.

## CONCLUSIONS

Riding rickshaw, either the cycle rickshaw or the hand-drawn rickshaw is extremely physically taxing, but does not require any formal education. The poor and needy people without their livelihood-asset and formal education find it attractive and enter the field to earn a living. Such an income provides a person with compensation for an injury with bleak prospects of financial growth. Furthermore, since they come from marginalized society, they lack government authorized identity cards or any official residential address except the *Ration Card*<sup>8</sup> which serves as their only source of identification. Hence, restricted savings leave them unguarded to even minor setbacks. So, when the family members encounter emergencies, they have very less or no savings to fall help and support them.

Rickshaw pullers belong to much marginalized section of society. It was noticed during the field survey that the majority of migrants were farmers, agricultural laborers, sweepers, labors, who arrived Gorakhpur for the reason being the better employment opportunities. They are also human beings, they also have a family, they also have their little kids who want to enjoy on the festive seasons. They also want to wear new clothes, buy sweets and visit

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<sup>8</sup> *Ration Card*: Government authorized ID cards for providing eatable on less price to the people

fairs. So, when they lack financial support, they can simply cry on their fate and conditions in a lonely place as they cannot fulfill the needs of their children.

The cycle-rickshaws can play a positive and inspiring role in the modern transport system when mobility and clean and healthy environment are the key concerns of the civil society. But it is very sad to highlight that the local government, in spite of so many issues is not paying even a side glimpse on the major issues faced by the cycle rickshaw pullers. The solutions suggested by the rickshaw pullers was the designing and building appropriate roads and more importantly increasing the parking facilities as there is only one authorized parking for rickshaw pullers and that is the Gorakhpur Railway Station. If by mistake they even park the vehicle for just a moment then they are the victim of verbal abuse by the local people and sometimes they even suffer physical damage. And since they lie on the softer side and cannot say anything to them, they face all the adversities either verbal or physical but cannot open their mouth. Even when they complain to the local police about the mishaps, the police instead of registering the complaint beat the rickshaw pullers for complaining and questioning on their status and verbally abuse them and their family.

In this fast growing modernized era of transports, one would have expected the rickshaws to extinct solely. But it is astonishing to visualize that their numbers have increased drastically during the recent decades. In the absence of any second means of transportation for shorter distance, these cycle rickshaws emerged out playing a vital role in the public service. In addition to it, they are convenient, environment friendly and cheap and best mode of door to door service. They solely meet the needs of urban and sub-urban people of middle and lower middle income groups and provide a cheap-cost of transportation of household goods and furniture. And the cycle rickshaws are the green mode of transportation that even contributes in reducing air pollution by its very nature of avoiding emissions.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It gives us an immense pleasure to express our deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to Gandhi Bhawan, University of Delhi, which has given us an opportunity to do study on Rickshaw Pullers through their Community Outreach Program in January 2014. We would especially like to acknowledge every rickshaw puller of Gorakhpur district, Uttar Pradesh for their co-operation, giving their valuable and precious time during their working hours for the entire period of field survey and discussion that we have done with them.

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