

Urban Informal Sector in Jammu and Kashmir: A Case Study of Sumo Drivers of District Srinagar

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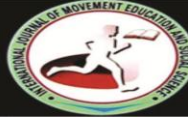
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ABSTRACT

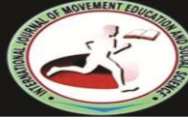
Informal sector plays an important role in the Indian economy. Workers in informal sector are found in rural areas as well as in urban areas. As in urban areas different job opportunities are available, so people in order to earn well go for migration from rural to urban areas. Within the urban areas only a small percentage of total workforces are absorbed in formal sector with comprehensive social security provisions. Major section of workforce is working in informal sector with least social security provisions. It is matter of fact that mostly socially and educationally backward people are working in informal sector. Informal sector workers don't have a sound social security provision as workers in the formal sector have. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir 88.5 percent of total workforce is working in informal sector. Workers in informal sector run business on their own accounts or work on per day low wages. The present research has been carried out on sumo drivers, with the purpose of studying their various life aspects like their economic conditions, social life and health problems. Sumo is one of the main modes of public transport in District Srinagar. Sumo is a four wheeler vehicle used to carry passengers in order to travel from one place to another. Many people get into this profession with hope of earning a decent income for the benefit of themselves and their families. However, the profession makes them to face various socio-economic challenges. In order to explore such challenges, a quantitative study was carried out in District Srinagar.

Keywords: *Srinagar, Informal Sector, Sumo Drivers, Health.*



INTRODUCTION

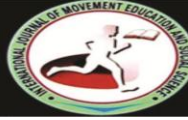
India has more than one billion population and its gross domestic product (GDP) is moving vertically ahead especially after India adopted the policy of liberalization. Due to liberalization private players start investing in India and this step proved fruitful to India to a large extent. Unemployed youth of the country got absorbed into private sector. As we all know that in private sector work load is very high and wages are less. Further private sector can adjust only those workers who are educated. But for those individuals who are illiterate it is impossible to get a job either government or private sector. Lack of education and skill has prompted millions of people to work in informal sector, informal sector means that sector in which individual start a small business on their own accounts or work in industries, factories and canteens on per day wages. As workers in these sectors work on temporary basis and without any social security benefits. It is a fact that informal sector is considered as low skilled sector, as workers in this sector lack skill and education. Earnings are very low in informal sector. But it is reality that the socio-economic development of India is mostly dependent of informal sector, as this sector is providing employment to millions of people. Informal sector is playing an important role in India, but still this sector lacks social security benefits. It is a matter of fact that informal sector is playing an important role and more than 90 percent of workforce is working in informal sector. Not only is this, in India the contribution of informal sector towards production of national products more than 50 percent. In informal sector mostly those people are working who are socially and economically backward. In India the term unorganized labor has been elaborated with in the scheme on informal laborers social security act, 2008. This act defines informal worker as a worker who works with in home, worker who starts small business unit on his own accounts and also includes those workers who work on per day wages. It also includes those workers who are working in formal sector but are not covered by any social security acts like, The Employees Compensation Act, 1923, The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, The Employees Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972. In India only 8 percent of workers are working in formal sector and the rest 90 percent of workers are working in informal sector. Within the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is one of the states of India has 85.7 percent of males and 96.3 percent are working in informal sector. It means that more than 85.5 percent of work force within the state is working in informal sector (Kalyani, 2015). The term unorganized sector is now a days known with the name of informal sector at the global level, is considered that sector which falls outside the world of usual, solid and confined service. Workers in informal sector are not governed by the existing law and even in formal sector are not protected by the government. All around the country we can see barbers, cobblers, waste recyclers and vendors of vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, snack-foods and a myriad of non-perishable items ranging from locks and keys, soaps and detergents, to clothing. Head-loaders, cart pullers, bicycle peddlers, rickshaw pullers, camel, bullock and horse cart drivers, Sumo drivers, and small kiosks or stalls owners (Chen, 2002). The major informal sector includes agricultural laborers, street vendors, construction laborers, domestic workers, bonded child laborers and public transport sector. There are different means of transport which comes under the domain of informal sector mainly it includes motorized and non-motorized. In motorized are include buses, sumos, taveras and auto rickshaws and in non-motorized are included cycle-rickshaw and bullock carts. Auto rickshaw drivers are self employed and mainly they belong to lower income families. As compare to those people who are working in formal sector with all social security benefits, workers



in informal sector don't possess any social security provision and same is the case with auto drivers. It is a matter of fact that despite having low standard of living and earnings, the role of auto drivers in providing service to general public is remarkable. The conditions of workers in informal sector have not improved much over the years (**Dinesh Mohan, and Dhanu Roy, 2003**). The urban centers are mostly dominated by auto rickshaws, which is one of the sectors of informal economy. In India auto rickshaws is main mode of public transport in urban and semi-urban areas. These auto rickshaws are a cheap and easily available source of public transport in most of the cities (**Chaudhary, et al., 2011**). Like autos are found abundantly all over India, these autos are also found with the state of Jammu and Kashmir, especially in district Srinagar which is the only city in whole of Kashmir valley. Most people who can afford the charges prefer to travel in auto. After auto the second most important preferred mode of public transport with is district Srinagar is sumo. Sumos are also found in huge number in district Srinagar. Here it very important to mention that most of the sumo drivers does not possess their own sumo, because of being poor they can afford to buy sumo which costs more than five lakh rupees. Most of the drivers, drive sumo on rent basis. Rich persons buy sumo and then hand over it those poor people who know driving and possess driving license. Sumo is given to a driver under proper agreement and the person who drives sumo of his master has to pay fixed amount to the owner per month. Driver is completely responsible for the safety of the vehicle. The present research is unique because on the particular research problem, no research has been varied out before this research. It is very important to mention here that with in this study only the monthly earnings of the sumo drivers have taken into consideration. This means the amount which is fixed by the owner of the vehicle for a driver per month and is paid to a sumo driver per month out of the total profit. So therefore not the total monthly earnings but only the monthly earnings of the sumo drivers is mentioned with the table as mentioned below. Society is not stratified on the basis of caste system in Srinagar but there are some communities who are socially and educationally backward like tribal community, fisherman community, sweeper community, and carpenter community. Social stratification is the hall mark of every society whether capitalist, democratic or class society. An individual within the society is welcomed or rejected on the basis of his occupation. Srinagar society is open society and provides equal opportunity to every individual belonging to any community to change his occupation. Changing occupation for socially backward communities is not so easy, as these communities are economically backward. It demands a lot of hard work and years together to change traditional occupation and enter into a new occupation which has socially more prestige as compared to traditional occupation. Major sections of the Srinagar society are engaged with informal sector and these workers mostly belong to socially and educationally weaker section of Srinagar society. Working in informal sector and going for occupation mobility is not so easy. As in informal sector earnings are less and this sector is looked socially down (**Najar, S.A; and Zargar, W. A; 2017**).

II. OBJECTIVES

- To study the socio-economic conditions of sampled Sumo drivers in district Srinagar
- To study the causes responsible for entering into Sumo driving profession.
- To study the health problems associated with this profession.
- To formulate a set of recommendations

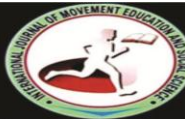


III. METHODOLOGY

Given the limitations of available data in understanding of the various dimensions and issues of workers involved in Sumo driving profession, which is widely acknowledged, the present study is primarily based on field study. The research design is exploratory, explanatory and descriptive in nature. Reason for using triangulation of methods was that regarding the concerned research problem there is very less information available. It can be said that the present research problem is almost unexplored. The universe of the study was District Srinagar. Stratified sampling was used to choose the sample of 100 Sumo drivers from four main Sumo stands of Srinagar namely Lal-chock, Khanyar, Batmallo and Hazartabal. Sumo drivers were informed about the purpose of the study. They were motivated to participate in study by the researcher and due care was taken while collecting data from the respondents. The study was continued till the desired sample size was reached. Data has been collected with the help of interview schedule, which was pre-tested before actually administering it. The collected data was then tabulated and analyzed properly.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mitra Arup (2014) has conducted a research on Urban Informal Sector and its role towards development in India. The author has revealed that the urban informal sector plays a vital role in providing sources of livelihood particularly to the rural migrants and several low income households residing in urban slums. This paper examines the relative size and composition of the informal sector and delineates the recent changes relating to contractualisation and ancillarisation and their impact on work practices and performance. The research has revealed that the rural laborers who are pushed out of the agricultural sector due to the lack of a productive source of livelihood and at the same time could not be absorbed in the rural non-farm sector or the high productivity manufacturing sector in the urban areas are likely to get residually absorbed in the low productivity urban informal sector. Also, a rapid natural growth of population in the urban areas has been adding substantially to the urban labor supplies. Despite a rise in enrolment ratio, a large component of this labor force is either of unskilled or semi-skilled variety. The author has mentioned that Employment growth in the informal (unorganized) manufacturing sector has been negative between 2005-06 and 2010-11. Possibly the informal sector units are not able to compete and thus in an attempt to reduce labor cost, the downsizing of employment has taken place widely. **(Amit Basole, 2014)** has written examined the role of the Informal Sector from a Knowledge Perspective. The author has mentioned that the informal sector is commonly thought of as a site of low-skilled or unskilled work. The research has revealed that the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) took the position that the vast majority of the informal workforce is unskilled. The author has discussed that this conclusion relies on two empirical facts: the low levels of formal education and training among informal sector workers and low wages as well as low productivity prevailing in this sector. The prevalence of low wages and low productivity in the informal sector is often used as proof of its low skill base. The author has mentioned that the perception of informal workers as unskilled does not only rely on economic factors outlined above. Sociological factors such as the prestige or value attached to different kinds of knowledge and philosophical factors such as what counts as knowledge are also important. For example, the knowledge of women and lower-caste workers, who are overrepresented in the informal sector, has traditionally



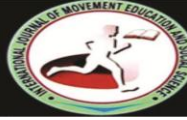
been undervalued. The author has concluded that nearly 90 per cent of the population above 15 years did not have any skills. (Sinha. A. K., 2015) has conducted research on assessment of strong auto rickshaw drivers in Bangalore city. The author has mentioned that Occupational stress is a physical or psychological disorder associated with an occupational environment and manifested in symptoms such as extreme anxiety, or tension, or cramps, headaches, or digestion problems. Occupational stress is a major hazard for many workers. The research has shown that there was stress among auto rickshaw drivers due to finance, Stress due to driving for long hours, Stress due to health conditions, Stress due to family and stress due to marital conflicts. In this regard there is need for creating awareness among autorickshaw drivers and further research in this field. Hence there is need for creating awareness regarding Health promotion, Balanced diet, Stress management and Counseling and regular Medical checkup. Health Insurance for all the Sumo-rickshaw drivers need to be looked into and implemented by government. (Gumber, Anil, 2006) in the study on "Health Security for Informal Workers" made an attempt to review the existing health insurance schemes catering to the general population along with the needs of informal sector and the poor sectors of the society. The study highlighted the demand for health insurance and suggested an affordable insurance plan for workers in the informal sector. The key findings of this study were that majority of health insurance schemes do not reach the poor section of society especially the women due to cultural constraints. Author explained that Panchayati Raj institution can play a pivotal role in advancing coordinating and managing new health insurance schemes. For this purpose the states shall delegate powers to Panchayati raj institutions (PRI) to plan, manage and run various welfare schemes including community health insurance to address the basic needs of the poorer section of the society.

V. DATA ANALYSIS:

Table 1 Age and Education of Respondents

Age of Respondents		Education of Respondents	
Class	Response	Class	Response
18 – 25	27	Illiterates	24
26 – 35	39	Up to primary	44
36 – 40	19	Up to 10 th	19
41 – 50	11	Up to 12 th	09
51 and above	04	Graduation	04
Total	100	Total	100

Table (1) shows the age and the education of the respondents. The analysis revealed that all of the Sumo drivers were adults. Participants were asked to be honest while giving the information about socio-demographic characteristics and they were assured that their names will not be mentioned anywhere. The Demographic



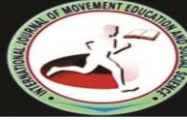
information was collected regarding age, education, monthly earning, marital status, etc. The research is an empirical study and the data has been collected from the field. The data was collected from 100 Sumo drivers working in different areas of district Srinagar, whose age was above 18 years and has been driving Sumo for more than one year. The above revealed that amongst the respondents, 27 respondents (27percent) are in between age group of 18-25 years, 39 respondents (39percent) are in between age group of 26-35 years, 19 respondent's (19percent) are in between age group of 36-40 years, 11 respondent's (11percent) are in between the age group of 41-50 and only 4 respondents (4percent) are more than 51 years of age. All the respondents has been driving Sumo from more than one year. So for the educational attainment of the respondents is concerned, the above table (table 1) makes it clear that amongst the respondents, 24 respondents (24percent) are illiterate, 44 respondents (44percent) have studied up to primary level, 19 respondents (19percent) have studied up to 10th level, 09 respondents (9percent) have studied up to 12th level and only 4 respondents (4percent) have studied up to graduation level. The research has revealed that most of the respondents are either illiterate or have studied up to primary level only.

The respondents revealed that education of an individual mainly depends on the economic conditions of the family. Due to lack of access to money an individual fails to receive quality education and because of culture of poverty they remain illiterates. Illiteracy prompts them to work in informal sector.

Table 2: Income from operating Sumo and reasons for choosing Sumo Driving Profession

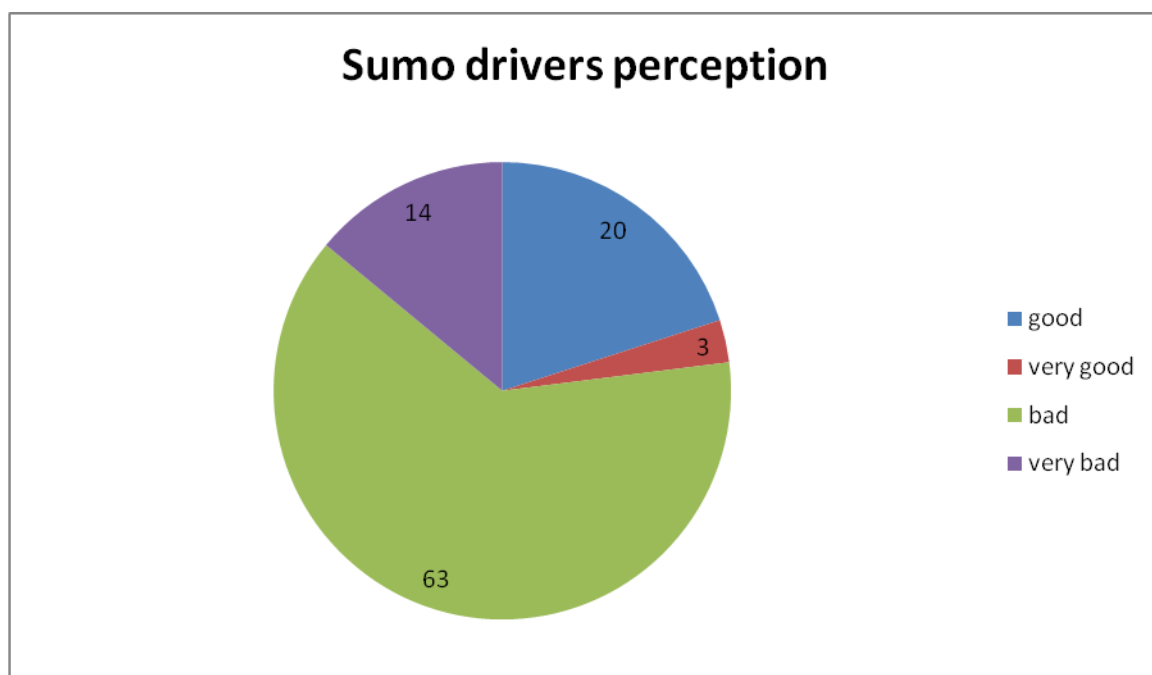
Monthly income of Respondents		Reasons for choosing Sumo Driving Profession	
Rupees	Response	Reasons	Response
3000 – 5000	09	Illiteracy	24
5001 – 8000	53	Lack of other employment opportunities	38
8001 – 10000	38	poverty	28
10001 – 12000	00	Absence of earning member in the family.	10
12001 – 15000	00		
Total	100	Total	100

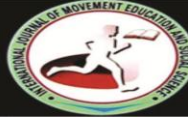
There are various driving forces behind taking Sumo driving profession. One school of thought argues that many of the working poor who enter Sumo driving do so because they do not find job in the formal economy for themselves. Thus driving Sumo serves as a refuge occupation, where low barriers to entry make it possible to earn a sustainable income. Another school of thought argues that people choose this occupation because it offers a more flexible or otherwise attractive employment option than other blue collar workers. The above table (table 2) reveals that 9 respondent (9percent) are earning 3000 to 5000 per month, 53 respondents (53percent) are earning 5001 to 8000 per month and 38 respondents (38percent) are earning 8001 to 10000 per month. The respondents mentioned that there are various hardships associated with this profession, as out of this profession



they are not able to full fill the basic requirements of their family members. The daily earnings are less. Further the respondents mentioned that our economic conditions become more worst when there are strikes because during strike days it is very difficult to come out of the homes and take passengers from one place to another place. These strikes affect our life badly. The respondents also mentioned that it is very difficult for us to send our children to private institutions were fee charge is very high. It is very difficult to live a descent on Sumo driving. So for the question of choosing this profession is considered the above mentioned table (table 2) reveals that 24 respondents (24percent) have chosen this profession because of illiteracy, 38 respondents (33percent) have chosen this profession because of lack employment opportunities in formal sector, 28 respondents (28percent) have chosen this profession because of poverty and they have started this profession by getting money from money lenders, for which they are paying heavy tax and the remaining 10 respondents (10percent) have chosen this profession because of having no earning hand within the families. All most all the hundred respondents revealed that they are not satisfied with this occupation because due to this profession we are not in a position to meet the daily requirements of life, especially during winter season it becomes very hard for us to full fill the basic needs of ourselves and of family members. The respondents were asked to reveal the various health problems associated with this profession. 80 respondents reveal that because of this profession they suffer from back pain, respiratory problem and head ache. The remaining 20 respondents mentioned that the main health problems associated with this profession are stress and fatigue. The respondents further revealed that due to health problems they often find it difficult to drive Sumo. But family conditions are not allowing us to take proper rest. All the 100 respondents mentioned that there is no social security provision for us from government. *The respondents revealed that poverty is an abuse because poverty disturbs the social, economic and psychological balance of poor. Poverty is not allowing them to enjoy the life fully and internalize the beauty of life.*

The pie chart below is about the sumo drivers perception about themselves how society treats them.





The pie chart as shown above depicts how Sumo drivers and their profession is perceived with in the wider society. The pie chart clearly shows that majority of the respondents revealed that they are socially discriminated because of this Sumo driving profession. 63 respondents out of 100 respondents (green portion of pie chart) mentioned that, we are badly treated by the society because of being illiterate. Society considers us vulgar and says that we are argumentative in nature. Out of total sample i.e. 100, 14 respondents mentioned that society treats us very badly because society considers us poor, manner less and drunkards, 20 respondents out of hundred reveal that society treats us in a good way because society considers us human as they are. Only a small portion of respondents (3 respondents) mentioned that societal attitude towards them is very good.

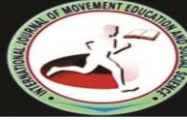
The respondents mentioned that social stratification is the hall mark of our society. In social stratification only those are respected who lie on the top of social hierarchy, which means those people who are economically well. Further the respondents mentioned that profession determines the social status of an individual. Those who are employed in government sector (formal sector) are socially respected especially those who hold the top positions. The respondents mentioned that our profession is looked down with in society and always we are being discriminated. Sometimes we think that we do not have any existence. Not only we are looked down but our children are also discriminated because of this profession.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

1. The educational attainment of the sampled Sumo drivers in district Srinagar is very low.
2. The economic condition of Sumo drivers is very bad.
3. Sumo drivers are socially discriminated.
4. Savings are almost negligible.
5. Sumo drivers are not getting any assistance from government
6. The respondents are not aware about social security act 2008 and various policies framed by government for informal sector and self-employed workers.
7. The respondents face many health problems because of this profession like back pain, respiratory problems, fatigue and head ache.
8. Sumo drivers are not able to send their children to private institutions because of low earnings.
9. Their children are looked down with in society.
10. Sumo drivers are not getting quality time which they can spend with their family.
11. Strikes affect the life of Sumo drivers badly.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

1. Sumo drivers in District Srinagar should be provided facilities like free life insurance and medical insurance by the government.
2. Sumo drivers should be made aware about the importance of balanced diet with the help of print and electronic media.
3. Government should provide scholarships to the children of Sumo drivers so that they can continue their education without any financial problem.



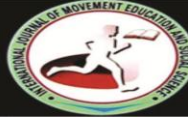
4. Counseling centers should be opened in District Srinagar, for full filling this objective both government and non-government organizations can play their role. These counseling centers can prove fruit for the Sumo drivers during stress.
5. Society as whole should change their negative attitude toward Sumo drivers.
6. Labor laws framed by the government should be further strengthen.
7. Sumo drivers should be made regarding various steps taken by the government of India for them and their children. Social media, electronic media, print media, should be utilized for this purpose.
8. Literate members of the society can also play a great role towards the upliftment of Sumo drivers by making them aware about various schemes launched by government.

VIII.CONCLUSION

The contribution of workers in informal sector towards the development of in India cannot be ignored. This sector is providing employment major section of the society. All those individual who are socially and economically back ward are concentrated in this sector. Not only this, even educated youth of the country are absorbed in informal sector because of non-availability of jobs in formal sector. But the workers in informal sector are trapped with so many problems. Government has taken steps for informal sector but the fact is that those steps exist only in papers. Need of the hour is that if we want that our informal sector should work properly then government need to take some bold steps for the informal sector. Provisions like Life insurance, medical insurance, pension, increase in per day wages, safe working places should be enhanced by the government. The informal sector in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has same position as in other state of India. Here workers in informal sector are also facing too many problems. When India is talking about liberalization, privatization and globalization, but the question is for whom? For only the elite class of the society, these three broad concepts have proven fruitful only for a small portion of the society but not for the larger section of the society. If India wants to develop, then informal sector should be given due care and should be taken seriously. So far the sumo divers of District Srinagar are concerned, free medical facility, counseling centers, comprehensive social security provisions must be provided.

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