

Social Conditions And Challenges Faced By The Ambulance Drivers

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Abstract

India Is At A Dire Condition Having 2,46,116 Deaths Recorded Since The Outbreak Of The Pandemic. (Cssegisanddata, 2020/2021; Dong Et Al., 2020) Ambulance Drivers Are One Group Among The Front Line Workers Who Have Majorly Contributed Their Service During The Pandemic. Though Some Of The Workers Are Paid By Through Government, Yet Many Fall Under Contract Or Private Workers And There Exists A Disparity In The Type Of Work Rendered As They Fall Under The Non-Unionised Type Of Workers (Unpaid For 3 Months, No Safety Gear, N.D.). Indian Labour Force Is Vast That Population Such As The Ambulance Workers Are Less Studied. The Pandemic Situation Has Increased The Work Hours Of Every Frontline Workers Increasing The Availability Of The Workers (Gupta & Sahoo, 2020). Their Conditions Are Deteriorating And Their Challenges Need To Be Studied Which Led To The Premise Of The Present Study. The Main Objective Of The Study Is To Understand The Social Conditions And Social Challenges Faced By The Ambulance Drivers And Suggest The Measures For Development. A Multiple Research Enquiry Was Adopted For The Purpose Of The Study Where 13 In-Depth Interviews And 1 Focus Group Discussion Was Conducted Among Ambulance Drivers In Bengaluru And Kanchipuram Districts. The Study Is Based On Sustainable Livelihood Approach (Serrat, 2017) As The Theoretical Premise With Which The Findings Have Been Analysed. The Findings Express That There Have Been Issues Already Such As Job Insecurity, Untimely Work, Work Overload Which Are Now At An Escalated Level With No Safety Measures Ensured, Less Support And Representation Of Their Problems At The Management Level. The Reseachers Further Mentioned The Suggestion Made By The Ambulance Workers Themselves For Various Stake Holder In The Full Article.

Key Words: Ambulance Drivers, Social Challenges, Conditions, Covid-Care, Front Line Workers.

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Ambulance Drivers As Non-Unionised Workers

Non-Unionised Workers Are One Among The Numerous Category Of Unorganised Labourers In The Country. They Are Characterised By Severe Occupational Hazards Such As Job Security, Contract, Job Description, Contracts, Health And Safety. Most Of Them Do Not Have Security Which Pushes Them To Be Vulnerable (Tailby, 2011). According To International Labour Organisation (Ilo) “Informal Sector Refers To Activities Operates At Typically Low Level Of Organisation And Technology, With The Primary Objective Of Creating Employment And Income. Small-Scale Operation, Little Barriers To Entry, Reliance On Family Labour And Local Resources, Labour Intensive Technology, And Low Capital Endowment, A High Degree Of Competition, Unregulated Market, Unskilled Workforce And Acquisition Of Skills Outside The Formal Education System Are Some Of The Characteristic Features Of Informal Sector.”(Organisation For Economic Co-Operation And Development, 2001) The Last Clause Which Speaks Of Acquisition Of Skills Outside The Formal Education System And Unregulated Market Is A Typical Example To Show Where The Plight Of Ambulance Drivers Stands.

In A Study Titled, “Self And Peer Assessments Of Ambulance Drivers” Speaks About The Driving Performance Of Ambulance Drivers. The Main Focus Of The Study Was To Develop And Examine The Quality Of The Ambulance Driver Self-Assessment Questionnaire. The Main Objective Of The Study Was To Measure Aspects Of Driving Performance, Driving Style And Driving Competence. The Findings Of The Study Was Majority Of Them Represent The Safe Overtaking Behavior And Majority Of Them Exceed The Speed Limit 30km/Hr. Majority Of Them Indicates The Good Speed Adaptation, 39% Of Them Rated Their Competence As Their Peers Did And 15% Rated Their Competence Higher Than Their Peer. The Article Concluded That Was No Relationship Between Selfreflection And Driving Performance, Driving Style And Competence. The Author Suggested That Drivers Rated Their Own Driving Performance As Safe And Their Driving Competence As Good In Those Areas Assessed. These Results Have To Be Interpreted With Some Caution However, Since The Psychometric Analyses Indicated That The Reliability For The Subscales Of Driving Performance Were Rather Low. (Sundstrom, 2012)

In A Study Titled, “The Prevalence Of Anxiety And Depression Among Health Care Workers During The Covid-19 Pandemic” Speaks About The Mental And Physical Health Problems Faced By The Forefront Workers During Pandemic. The Health Care Workers Who Work At Forefront During Disaster Or Any Other Emergency Situations. The Health Care Workers For This Study Includes Ambulance Drivers, Doctors, Health Assistants, Staff Nurses, Paramedics, Ward Attendants, Security Guards, Sanitization Workers Who Are Closely Involved With The Patients Affected By Covid-19. The Main Objective Of The Study Is To Find Out The Anxiety And Depression Level Among The Health Care Workers In The Pandemic Period. The Findings Of The Study Are The Majority Of The Health Care Workers Are Faced The Mental Illness Like Anxiety And Depression During The Pandemic. The Study Concluded By Stating That The Support System Needed For The Health Care Workers To Reduce The Mental Illness Faced By Them. (Sahebi, et al., 2021).

The Coping Strategies Used By The Health Care Workers To Manage Their Mental Health Consequences Such As Stress, Depression, Anxiety, Insomnia Is Very Alarming. Hardly These Health Care Workers Find Time To Take Self-Precautions And Do Self-Care. Some Of Them Tend To Use Positive Coping Mechanisms Through The Usage Of Psychological, Social And Religious Or Spiritual Approaches But Some Of Them Resort To Maladaptive Coping Strategies Like Consuming Alcohol, Cigarettes, Over Consumption Of Food Which Increase The Risk In Long Term. The Health Care Workers Are Lacking In Psychological Support Among The Team. Proper Team Work And Familial Care Is Necessary Among Frontline Workers Which At Times Is Hassling For An Individual (Htay, et al., 2021). The Fear The Families And Peer Have Surrounding The Area Where Front Line Workers Operate Brings In The Aspect Of Poor Social Support. Many Of Them Become Unwilling To Work Due To This Reason. Fear Created By The People With Whom The Front Line Workers Reside Creates A Disinterest And Psychological Distress Among Them. This Further Calls For Specialized Psycho-Social Care And Effective Coping Strategies To Be Taught Among The Front Line Workers Such As The Doctors, Nurses And Ambulance Drivers (Que, et al., 2020).

Ambulance Drivers Face A Variety Of Issues, On One Side They Are Under-Represented At Their Work Places And On The Other Side There Is Less Public Support. Many Of The Citizens Are Unaware Of What Could Be The Emergency Support A Person Can Provide To An Ambulance Driver. Sometimes Reaching To Different Floors Of The Patients And Carrying Them Needs Extra Hands For Help, Which Seldom Reaches In Time. Overcrowded Streets

And Non-Availability Of Lift Facility In The Residence Of The Patients Are Some Other Issues Faced By The Ambulance Drivers (Jena, Dubey, & Dhal, 2010).

Having Such Problems, The Condition Of The Ambulance Drivers In Special Context Of The Pandemic Needs To Be Researched Upon Which Led To The Premise Of The Present Study. This Study Is An Ongoing Independent Work Taken By The Researchers. There Were Four Major Objectives Among Which The Findings Based On Two Objectives Namely ‘To Understand The Social Conditions And Social Challenges Faced By The Ambulance Drivers And Suggest The Measures For Development’. A Multiple Research Enquiry Was Adopted For The Purpose Of The Study Where 13 In-Depth Interviews And 1 Focus Group Discussion Was Conducted Among Ambulance Drivers In Bengaluru And Kanchipuram Districts. The Methods Used Were In-Depth Interviews Through The Use Of An Interview Guide And Focus Group Discussion (Fgd) Through The Use Of An Fgd Guide. For The Purpose Of The Same Purposive Sampling Was Used And The Data Was Analysed Trough Thematic Analysis And Represented As Themes And Verbatims.

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach

The Study Is Based On Sustainable Livelihood Approach (Serrat, 2017) As The Theoretical Premise With Which The Findings Have Been Analysed. The Idea Of “Sustainable Livelihoods” Make Up The Idea Of Various ‘Sustainable Livelihood Approaches’ (Sla) And Has Been Modified By Various Development Agencies Which Expresses That A Livelihood Is Sustainable When It Can Cope With And Recover From Stresses And Shocks And Maintain Or Enhance Its Capabilities And Assets Both Now And In The Future, While Not Undermining The Natural Resource Base.”(Dfid, 2000) Sustainability Livelihood May Be Categorized As Sustainable If It Is Resilient In The Face Of External Shocks And Stresses If It's Far Impartial Of Outside Help If It Is Able To Hold The Long-Time Period Productivity Of Natural Assets And If It Does Not Undermine The Livelihood Options Of Others.(Kollmair & Gamper, 2002) The Dfid Framework Sets Out To Conceptualise How People Function Inside A Vulnerability Context That Is Shaped Through Various Factors – Moving Seasonal Constraints (And Possibilities), Economic Shocks And Longer-Term Trends. It Also Checks How They Draw On One-Of-A-Kind Varieties Of Livelihood Assets Or Capitals In Exclusive Mixtures That Are Influenced By Using The Vulnerability Context, A Number Institutions, And Tactics, How They Use Their Asset Base To Expand A Variety Of Livelihood Strategies To Gain Preferred Livelihood Outcomes.(De Stag , Holloway, Mullins, & Nchabaleng, 2002)

Findings And Discussion

Social Security:

As Per The World Development Report, 1997, Social Security Should Be Viewed As An Investment For Human Development (A.M.Sharma, 2006). The Developing Countries Like India, Social Security Arrangements To Meet Future Events Or Circumstances Like Health, Accidents, Death And Old Age In India Have Legal Support To The Employees Who Work In The Formal Sector (Kannan, 2007). In That Case, The Informal Sector Is Exceptional And Only Law Applies To Unorganized Sector Workers Were Minimum Wages Act Which Is Supposed To Address The Working Conditions (Sengupta, 2007). The Government Of India Has Enacted The Certain Legislative Protection For The Formal Sector Workers Like Esi Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, Employees' Provident Fund And Miscellaneous Provisions Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Payment Of Gratuity Act. Primarily It Doesn't Cover The Unorganized Sectors But It Should Be Considered And It Has Eligibility And Benefits For The Workers (Fasih, 2011). In The Case Of Ambulance Drivers, They Aren't Getting Pf, Esi, And Compensation For Injury Or Accident At The Workplace. In Order To Save The Lives Of Others, The Ambulance Drivers Would Cross The Speed Limit That Might Cause Accidents But They Won't Get Compensation Or Get Them Very Late From The Management Side As Well As From The Hospital. Though The Ambulance Drivers Are Getting Less Pay, They Are Eligible To Get Pf And Esi But It Is Denied Because Of Contract Basis Work For Few Workers. Out Of 13, 9 Respondents Said That They Don't Have Social Security That Is Pf, Esi And Any Other Benefits. Through The Verbatim, One Could Be Understood From The Statement By Saying, *"Most Of The Money Goes On Familial Expenses Because Of Which There Is Hardly Any Money That I Could Save. When Our Salaries Are Less, We Are Entitled For Pf And Esi Benefits But As It Increases Our Contracts Are Broken Into Few Months And Kept On Renewed Due To Which Applying Pf Takes Time. I Got My Pf After 4 Years Of Waiting On The Contract System. Some Of Them Are Still Struggling To Get This"*.

This Also Could Be Understood From The Statement Of Ambulance Drivers In Focus-Group Discussion Saying, *"Some Of Us Are Aided And We Have A Separate Ambulance Van, We Get Pf, Esi, Weekly Off, Cl, El, Da, Ml And Increment Every Year But Many Of Our Friends Are Working In Private Or As Contract Workers For Whom There Isn't Such Benefits. It Has Become Common That Once The Job Is Taken Away (Which Could Be Due To Any Or No Reason) The Driver Has To Move Away"*. A Similar Finding Has Been Expressed By Sen (2011) In The Study Titled "Impact Of Social Security Schemes And Welfare Programmes On

Beedi Rollers” Who Has Found Out In His Research That Majority Of The Labour Workforce Haven’t Received Any Allowances Or Gratuities.

Overtime Work:

Labour Is Not Only A Factor Of Production But It Has Human Aspects Also With Some Feelings And Enthusiasm Of His Own (Singh, 2017) But Ambulance Drivers Were Working More Than 8 Hours But Still, Some Of Them Weren’t Getting Extra Amount For The Over Time Work (Ot). All The Respondents Said That They Are Working Overtime And No Extra Amount. Especially Due To The Pandemic, There Is A Need For Emergency Services For Which Ambulance Drivers Are Required In Huge Numbers. Due To Poor Staffing Structure, The Existing Ambulance Drivers Are Made To Work Over Time. The Workload Isn’t Equally Distributed And There Is No Payment For The Extra Work Done Which Is Alarming. It Shows That The Management Used The Productivity Of The Employee Without Giving Any Income For The Work Done By Them. It Could Be Understood From The Statement Where The Respondent Said, *“I Am Not Earning Extra Income For The Ot And I Am Responsible To Work If Any Driver Takes The Day Off In Order To Manage The Work. I Am Working 8 Hours A Day But Sometimes Management Demands Us To Work More Due To The Limited Number Of Employees And Denied To Give Money For The Work. I Am Earning Rs. 15,000 As Monthly Income In This Field But Due To The Pandemic I Work For 16-18 Hours A Day. Most Of My Time Gets Spent In The Hospital Or In My Van”*.

The Focus Group Discussion Also Brought Out The Fact That That The Duration Of Work Of Ambulance Drivers Is More Than 12 Hours Sometimes And No Money For Ot. One Of Them Expressed That They Work For More Than 12 Hours And To Keep Up The Income They Take Up Extra Part Time Works Thus Working Round About Without Proper Rest.

Dignity And Recognition:

The Unorganized Workers Are Always Deprived Of Some Essential Facilities Like Good Working Conditions, Health Service, Prevention Of Accidents, First Aid Facility, Housing Facility, Canteen Facility And So On And Also They Have The Right To Get Benefits And Welfare (Uttam, 2013). The Work Of The Ambulance Drivers Wasn’t Recognized From The Public As Well As From The Government Because Of Certain Things Like Illiteracy, Low Wages, And Non-Unionisation And So On. The Drivers Will Be Abused By The Management And Patient’s Attende If They Reach Late. It Happens Most Of The Time Due To Traffic Or Not Aware Of The Location. Out Of 13, 11 Respondents Said That They Are Not Recognized

In A Good Way By Society As Well As From The Management. It Shows That They Are Not Getting Respect For Saving The Lives Of The People And Not Getting Enough Income For Risking Their Own Lives To Save Others. Through The Verbatim, One Could Be Understood From The Statement By Saying, *“The Ambulance Call Center Got A Call From An Unknown Person And Stated That The Road Accident Happened Near My Locality And The Call Was Directed To Me. I Went To The Spot And The Victim Was Affected Badly And The Brain Has Come Out And It Was Swelling And Blood Overflowing In The Road. The Victim Passed Away In The Spot And I Didn’t Know What To Do Because The State Of The Victim Was Pathetic And It Was Night Time And I Didn’t Have Anyone To Help Me And The People Around The Spot Forced Me To Take The Body And No One Is Ready To Help Me To Hold Or Carry The Stretcher. Finally, I Got Hit By The People And I Didn’t Have Any Choice To Do Because That Time I Had Only One Woman With Me From The Hospital Side And Also I Was Responsible To Leave The Woman To Their Home Safely. That Was One Of The Hard Situations I Have Faced In My Service And The People Have Treated Me Very Badly Without Thinking About The Situation”*.

This Also Could Be Understood From The Statement Of Ambulance Drivers In Focus-Group Discussion Saying, *“Sometimes We Are Taken To For Granted. Just Because Someone Calls And Places A Request Doesn’t Mean The Van Could Fly And Come. Think Of The Traffic, In This Situation Where Bangalore Has The Peak In Covid Cases Will We Be Running For Small Helps Or The Covid Emergencies? The Hospitals That We Work Usually Charged 2000 For Runs Within The City, Some Of Them Have Increased The Fee To Rs. 6,000 And People Think That It Is Us Who Takes The Extra Cash, Even When The Hospital Provide Them With The Bills For It. These Are Under-Represented Even At The Management As Most Of The Time It Ends Up Being Laughed At Or As A Mockery”*.

The Work Demands Interpreting The Family Life Of The Individuals So It Brings Conflict Among Them Or Help Them To Create Good Understanding Among Themselves. The Conflicts Arise Mostly Based On Long Working Hours, Physical Strain And Mental Stress And Behaviour (Vasumathi, 2018). The Negative Effects Of The Employees’s Job Reach Their Family And Make Them To Unsupportive For The Job Or Work Done By The Workers (Jackson, 1982).The Primary Support For The Workers Is Family Members And They Can Give Emotional And Instrumental Support To The Workers Outside Of The Work Place (Caplan, 1976). In The Case Of Ambulance Drivers, The Work They Are Doing Is Very Risky And They Need Family Support To Help Them Emotionally And Financially Because They

Are Earning Very Less Income So To Satisfy The Family Needs, The Family Members Have To Support Him Financially. Sometimes, The Ambulance Driver Is The One Who Takes Care Of Everything And Manage The Family Needs.

Financial Exclusion

Financial Exclusion Is Lack Of Access Of Credit Facilities From The Financial Institutions Due To Lack Of Social And Job Security, Less Wages And Background Of The Applicant (Dev, 2006). The Term Financial Exclusion Is Normally Related To The Lack Of Access To Affordable Financial Services To The Individuals Who Are Ineligible In Term Of Wealth, Occupation, Education And Location. Around 2.5 Billion People Were Working Without Utilising The Basic Formal Financial Services. The Problem In Financial Exclusion Is Set Certain Terms And Conditions And It Is More Severe In Rural India To Get The Credit Facilities From The Financial Institutions (Shafi, 2012). The Government Of India Launched The Different Programme To Reduce The Financial Exclusion Or Provide Adequate Financial Services To All The Individuals Without Any Discrimination Based On Wealth, Education, Occupation And Location But The Financial Inclusion Couldn't Take Place In The Reality (Sukumaran, 2015). In The Case Of Unorganized Sector Workers, They Don't Have Written Agreement Of Contract Work, Illiteracy And No Social Security Separate Them From Utilizing The Financial Services From The Banking Institutions. The Ambulance Drivers Are Not Aware Of The Programme Offered From The Indian Government In Order To Reduce The Financial Exclusion. The Ambulance Drivers Are The One Who Are Getting Untimely Wage, No Social Security, No Working Credits And So It Excludes Them To Get The Financial Services. Out Of 13, 5 Respondents Are Unable To Get The Money From The Financial Institutions. Through The Verbatim, One Could Be Understood From The Statement By Saying, *"I Wanted To Borrow A Loan From The Bank But I Was Ineligible Because Of Less Pay, No Job Security And I Don't Have Tangible Assets To Give As Security. The Loan Amount Is To Buy Land And Run His Family Peacefully But The Institution Denied It. Some Schemes Offer The Loan To The Unorganized Sector Sectors But He Is Not Getting It Though He Belongs To Different State"*.

Scope For Interconnectedness And Social Work

The Pandemic Has Brought Into Limelight The Plight Of The Healthcare Workers Working On The Front Line Among Whom Ambulance Drivers Play A Vital Role. Keeping This In Mind The Management Can Create Positive Relationship With The Employees And

Understand The Problem To Solve And Rectify From Their Side. Ambulance Drivers Should Be Allowed To Form An Association Within Every City Supported By A Trade Union Or An Association. Social Security Schemes And Benefits Should Be Made Aware Of By The Hospital Management And Social Workers Can Help In Creating Convergence Here By Linking The Government Services To The Ambulance Drivers. Most Of The Hospitals Where They Work Have Medical And Psychiatric Social Workers Who Can Handle Stress Relief Sessions And Positive Psychological Aids That Can Balance The Mental Health Of These Workers. Social Workers Can Act As Enablers In Working With The Labour Welfare Office Of The Respective Districts And Help In Reaching Ambulance Drivers To Any Governmental Assistance That May Be Required. Social Workers Working As Hospital Administrators And Human Resource Managers Should Ensure That The Drivers Are Treated With Dignity And Respect The Work Hours. They Should Ensure That The Occupational Hazards Faced By The Drivers Are Taken Care. Thus Social Workers Can Ensure A Great Connectedness By Conjoining Different Stake Holders To Ensure Holistic Welfare For The Ambulance Drivers.

Conclusion

In India, 94% Are Unorganized Labourers And Remaining 6% Are Organized Labourers (Labour Laws and Other Labour Regulations, 2007). Despite The Fact That There Are Different Boards And Schemes Working For The Welfare Of The Unorganized Labourers, Most Of The Ambulance Drivers Aren't Getting Any Benefits Or Welfare For The Betterment In Their Life. This Research Studied The Social Conditions And Social Challenges Faced By The Ambulance Drivers. The Dignity And Self-Worth Of The Drivers Isn't Recognized By The Hospitals As Well As The Society. They Are Working Lengthy Hours And Not Getting Respect From Anyone But Still They Love This Job And Have Pride For Saving Other's Life. Though They Are Getting Less Pay And Staying In Rental House Without Any Social And Job Security Yet The Job Satisfaction Is Predominantly High. The Need For Ambulance Drivers Is Much Realized Now In The Context Of The Pandemic But The Struggle They Go Through In Their Profession Which Hassles Their Connect To Their Person Is Vaguely Understood Or Not Understood At All. This Is Where The Researchers Wish To Encourage Social Workers To Help In Ensuring Their Welfare By Boosting Support From The Families And Work Environment At The Micro Level And Ensure Welfare Entitlements From The Government At The Macro Level Which Is The Main Base Of The Sustainable Livelihood Approach That Ensures That Each Of The Asset And The Government Play A Pivotal Role In Taking Care Of The Needs Of These Workers Who Run Wheels To Save Live.

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