

## Socioeconomic Analysis of the Migrated Rickshaw Pullers in Comilla City of Bangladesh

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**ABSTRACT:** Rickshaw is very popular as a mode of transport in Bangladesh. Every year from different part of Bangladesh a large number of literate and illiterate people join the labour market. Because of the insufficient jobs in the labour market, most of these people try to find jobs in the informal sector like rickshaw pulling. This study is conducted to analyze the socioeconomic conditions of those people who are involved in the rickshaw pulling occupation in the city of Comilla, Bangladesh. The objectives of this study are to find out the causes of migration, assess the demographic status and the previous occupation and finally analysis the income-expenditure status and remitting behaviour of the migrated rickshaw pullers. 150 rickshaw pullers have been randomly selected for the study purposes. The findings of the study reveal that rickshaw pulling is an easy way of earning more money and employment but the social status of the rickshaw pullers are not satisfactory and it is not an economically sufficient way to earn the livelihood in the long run.

**KEYWORDS:** Earnings; expenditure; migration; remittance; seasonal variations.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is one of the most populated countries in the world where 35.2 percent of the rural people live below the poverty line[1]. Lack of assets, limited employment opportunities, high illiteracy rate and high income inequalities force many rural people to migrate to urban area for better employment opportunities, improved livelihood and better amenities. However, due to lack of education and industrial skills, these migrated rural people cannot find employment in the formal sector and other related sectors. These migrated people mostly find jobs in different informal sectors such as hotel and restaurant, petty retail trade, transport, construction and domestic services. Among these informal sector activities rickshaw pulling attracts a greater number of migrated people. The people who earn their livelihood by pulling rickshaw are called the rickshaw puller. The cycle rickshaw as a local means of transportation are widely used in major cities of the South East-Asia and South Asia particularly in Bangladesh and India for the shorter distance[2]. In Bangladesh, it gets popularity because it is safe and convenient for the shorter distance as well as the cheapest means of transportation. Though rickshaw pulling bears a symbol of poverty but provide bread and livelihood for those people who are coming from economically backward area and largely depend on this profession[2]. Earlier studies [3,4] have analyzed different aspects of the rickshaw pullers in the Dhaka city but there is no existing research on the rickshaw pullers in Comilla city.

Rickshaw is widely used and very much popular for short distance in Comilla city. A large number of migrants initiated their urban career in this sector. But we have limited information about them. Who are these people? Where these people come from? What are the factors that push them to migrate? What are the reasons of choosing this occupation? So, the purpose of this study is to conduct a research to know the several aspects of the migrant rickshaw pullers. The study is conducted in Comilla city with the following specific objectives:

- i. To understand the demographic characteristics and previous occupations of the people who engaged in rickshaw pulling.
- ii. To find out the causes of migration of rickshaw pullers.
- iii. To analyze income-expenditure status and remitting behaviour of the migrant rickshaw pullers.

The remaining of the paper is organized in the following way. In section 2, the background of the study area is discussed. Section 3 presents the methodology of the study. We analyse and discuss the result and findings from the study in section 4 and section 5 concludes the paper.

## **2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA**

Comilla city is selected as study area which is located at 23.4583<sup>0</sup> N latitude and 91.1833<sup>0</sup>E longitude in the south eastern of Bangladesh. Comilla is about hundreds kilometers south-east of Dhaka city. It covers a total area of 11.47 square kilometers and had a population of 168378 where male 52.56% and female 47.44%. The literacy rate among the people was 55%. The city was connected by Grand Trunk road, railway and airport as well as it is the transit point between Dhaka-Chittagong highways. The city contains trade and cottage industries especially 'Khadi' textile, Bakhrabad Gas Field, Export Processing Zone (EPZ), and BARD which is well known for research on Rural Development. On the other hand Comilla is well known as a city for education having a Public University (Comilla University), Secondary and higher secondary education board, Medical College, Cadet College, Zilla School, Polytechnic institution and also a lot of educational institution.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the objectives of the study, data has been collected using a structured questionnaire from 150 rickshaw pullers who have migrated from different parts of Bangladesh and currently active in Comilla city. In order to meet the objectives, the entire study is based on primary data and data have been collected through face-to-face interview in 2014. The city has been divided into five strata according to the following function, i.e. access to the city (Tiprabazar, Cantonment), core of the city (Thomson Bridge), medical centre (Medical area), residential area (Doulotpur) and education centre (Kotbari). The reason behind the selection of the area has been the availability of a reasonable number of respondents and availability of easy communication to each the area. On the basis of stratified random sampling, 30 migrated rickshaw pullers from each stratum were randomly selected and the selected pullers were interviewed. After collecting data, it have been checked and verified to make sure that answer to each item had been properly recorded. Collected data have been tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Figures and diagrams are used to represent the findings of the present study.

## **4 RESULTS**

### **4.1 SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC STATUS OF THE RICKSHAW PULLERS**

Demographic factors can be divided into age, education and marital status. For the socioeconomic analysis of the rickshaw pullers, it is important to estimate the demographic status of the rickshaw pullers. We discussed the results in the following subsection.

#### **4.1.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION**

From the survey it has been found that only 2% of the rickshaw pullers' age is below 20 years and the mean age of the rickshaw pullers is 35 years. Since this occupation requires more physical energy, the percentage of the aged rickshaw pullers is very low. Yet 6% of the aged rickshaw pullers who are above 49% are visible for pulling rickshaw. In this case most of them claim that their children do not want to take their responsibility. So they find no other way to earn their livelihood at this and are engaged in this occupation.

#### **4.1.2 LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

Education is one of the most important indicators to determine the status of a people in the society. The distribution of the respondents according to the education status is reported in table-1. Generally rickshaw pullers have come from the economically backward family, so the level of education among the rickshaw pullers is very poor. Illiteracy is very common among them (30%). The survey result shows that about 40% of the rickshaw pullers have completed their primary level of education. Around 24% of the rickshaw pullers have secondary education.

*Table 1. Distribution of of respondents according to educational levels*

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	45	30
Primary level ( class 1-5)	60	40
Secondary level (6-10)	35	23.33
SSC and above	10	6.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.1.3 MARITAL STATUS

Marital status is one of the factors for the determination of migration. Among the married person the migration rate is high than the unmarried person. From the survey we have found that most of the migrated rickshaw pullers (82%) are married whereas 16% are unmarried and very few (2%) are widower/Divorced. High engagement of migrated married person in this profession implies that a married person has the responsibility to maintain his family and always have a tendency to earn better income to meet the daily needs of his family

#### 4.2 PREVIOUS OCCUPATION OF THE RICKSHAW PULLERS

To know the socioeconomic conditions of the rickshaw pullers it is necessary to analysis the previous occupation. Table-2 shows that 64% of the rickshaw pullers were agricultural labourers and farmers where Construction labourers (6%), Hawkers (2%), Workers in hotel-restaurant (4%), Day labourer (6%), non-workers (4%) and other workers (14%).The reason is that Bangladesh is an agricultural country where a large part of the population earns their livelihood by working in the agriculture sector .But due to low wage, over-crowding, high input cost and lesser amount of output in the agriculture, sector they are forced to earn their supplement income by rickshaw pulling.

*Table 2. Distribution of the respondents according to previous occupation*

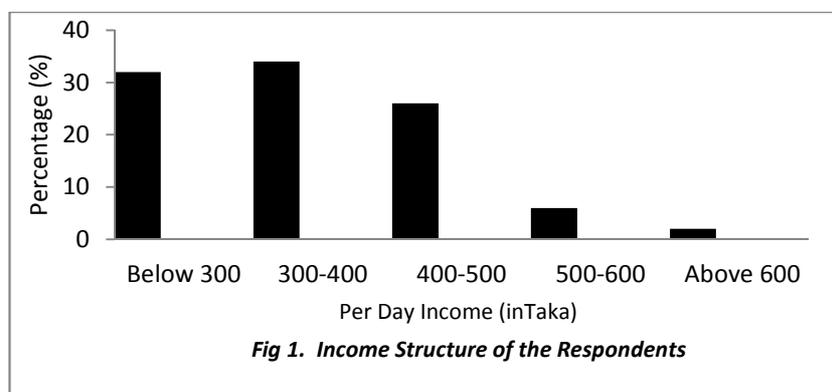
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Agricultural laborers	78	52
Farmers	18	12
Laborers in construction	09	6
Hawkers	03	2
Workers in Hotel-restaurant	06	4
Day labor	09	6
Non workers	06	4
Other workers	21	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.3 SEASONAL VARIATION AND INCOME STRUCTURE OF THE RICKSHAW PULLERS

Compared to the other informal occupations, a rickshaw puller may earn a handsome amount of money and send a significant amount to their family. But their daily earnings are unpredictable and very much fluctuates depends on seasonal variation and distance. We present the statistics on seasonal variation of income of the rickshaw pullers in table-3. The survey result shows that due to the heat of the sun during summer most of the people prefer to use the rickshaw as transportation and about 36% of the pullers report this reason. However, 58% of the rickshaw pullers said that they earn more during the winter and suggest that during the winter they can demand higher rent. Finally 6% of the rickshaw pullers argue that they earn more during the rainy season. The earnings of the rickshaw pullers also vary because of the distance of the trip. For example, on an average rickshaw pullers charge TK.10 for the short distance, TK. 25 for the medium distance and TK. 50 for longer distance trips. Figure-1 depicts the per day income of the rickshaw pullers in Commilla city. The figure reveals that 32% of the rickshaw pullers earn less than TK. 300 per day. Earnings range for 34% rickshaw pullers is TK. 300-400 per day. Only 2% of the rickshaw pullers earn more than TK.600.

*Table 3. Seasonal variation of in the earnings of rickshaw pullers*

Season	Frequency	Percentage
Summer	54	36
Winter	87	58
Rainy season	9	6
Total	150	100



#### 4.4 OWN EXPENDITURE OF THE RICKSHAW PULLERS

People who are engaged in rickshaw pulling come from rural areas and more or less poor. In order to meet the basic needs these poor people migrates to the area where they can earn more than expenditure. Since the livelihood of their family depends on their saving so they are very much conscious about their expenditure. However, rickshaw puller faces both direct and indirect cost like rickshaw maintenance, penalties and fines. Beside these rickshaw pullers also spend a part of their daily income on their daily essential items. For example, the survey results indicate that most of the rickshaw pullers' daily expenditure for food is Tk. 90, for cigarette and betel leaf is Tk. 15 and for rickshaw rent is Tk. 60.

#### 4.5 REMITTANCE BEHAVIOUR OF THE RICKSHAW PULLERS

Most of the migrated rickshaw pullers report that they are the main income-earning person of their family. The livelihood of their family depends on their income. So, their aim is to earn more money and transfer it to their family members. Table-4 indicates that 52% of the rickshaw pullers transfer less than TK. 5000 per month to their family. For 26% rickshaw pullers this transferable range is TK. 5000-6000 per month. About 2% transfer in between TK. 8000-9000 per month and for 6% it is more than TK. 9000 per month. Frequency of money transfers is different among the rickshaw pullers. For instance, most of the rickshaw pullers (78%) transfer monthly while around 14% transfer weekly. In terms of the way of transferring money to the family survey result shows that most of the rickshaw pullers (86%) use bkaash to transfer the money. A large proportion of the rickshaw pullers prefer to use bkaash to transfer the money to their family members since is it quick and easily accessible. On the other hand, 12% of the rickshaw pullers prefer to use formal transfer systems such as post office and bank account for transferring money to their family.

*Table 4. Distribution of respondents in terms of per month transfer of money to the family*

Amount (TK.)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 5000	78	52
5000-6000	39	26
6000-7000	12	8
7000-8000	09	6
8000-9000	03	2
Above 9000	09	6
Total	150	100

#### 4.6 REASONS FOR THE MIGRATION OF RICKSHAW PULLERS

According to the survey, most of the rickshaw pullers (92%) come from the northern part of Bangladesh and the rest of the rickshaw pullers (8%) come from other part of Bangladesh. Why a large number of people migrate from the northern part? People migrate from this region, which is very much affected by natural calamities and economic crisis [5]. From the survey, it is found that most of the rickshaw pullers (90%) claim that there are two factors i.e. natural factors (Flood and River bank erosion) and economic factors (poverty and unemployment) lead them to migrate. Table- 5 presents the distribution of the migrated rickshaw pullers according to the reasons for migration. They argue that Northern part of Bangladesh is affected monsoon, floods, river erosion, drought and cold waves, all of which occur more frequently and affects a large number of people who are directly involved in the agriculture activities. For this natural factors employment opportunity is very limited in this region. About 50% of the rickshaw puller state unemployment as their reason for migration to Comilla. Since they have no work so they have no scope to earn money to buy livelihood and poverty is very much common among them. So to remove the curse of poverty every year a large number of people from the northern region i.e. Gaibandha, Rangpur, Nelphamary, kurigram, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat and Panchgore are agreed to migrate to the place where employment opportunities are available.

*Table 5. Distribution of the respondents according to the reasons of migration*

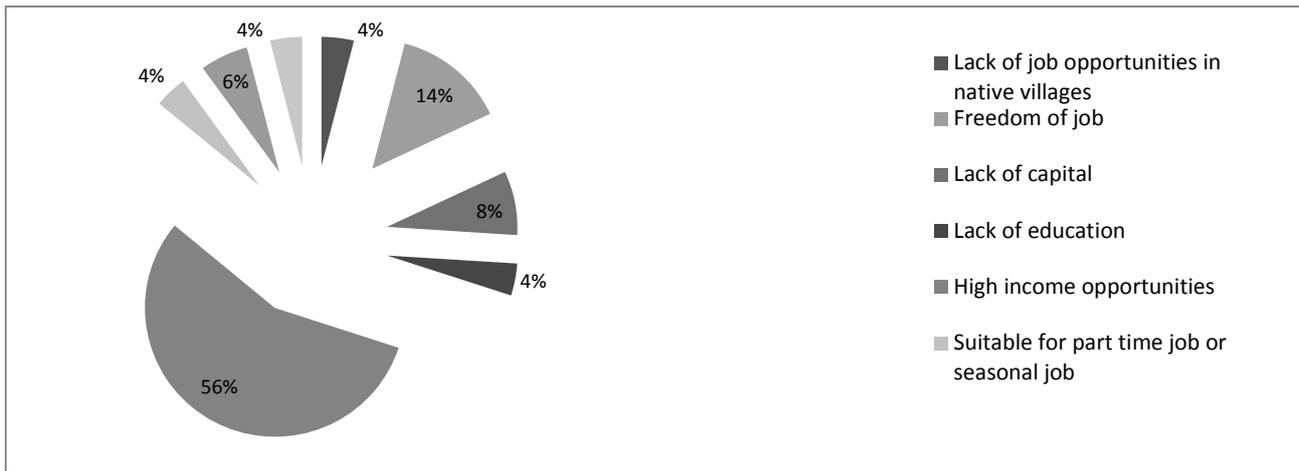
Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	48	32
Unemployment	75	50
Natural disasters	12	8
Others	15	10
Total	150	100

#### 4.7 REASONS FOR CHOOSING COMILLA CITY

Rickshaw is the popular mode of transportation in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there are more than 800,000 rickshaw pullers. A large number of rickshaws are pulled in the Dhaka city which is known as the world's capital city of rickshaw. Monthly income of rickshaw pullers in the Dhaka city is up to tk. 14000 which is eight times higher than the basic minimum wage of a garments worker. In spite of higher income why people choose to pull the rickshaw in another part of Bangladesh rather than Dhaka city? In this regard they claim several reasons, i.e. political confusion, traffic jam, insecurity, rickshaw license fee, high rickshaw rent and high living cost. Most of the rickshaw pullers opine that they face many challenges during the unstable political situation. When the political party calls strike, they depend on their saving which they wish to send to their family. Some of the rickshaw pullers blame the rickshaw owners for sharing a large proportion of their income in Dhaka. For this reasons in recent time most of the rickshaw puller want to departure from the Dhaka city and choose to migrate those places where they feel save to pull the rickshaw or able to pull the rickshaw without rickshaw license, no traffic jam, income from pulling rickshaw is high but expenditure is low, low living and rickshaw rent cost, availability of various amenities and improved transport or communication system. In this regard although Comilla is far from northern region compared to Dhaka city, they consider above mentioned reasons to come to Comilla city for rickshaw pulling

#### 4.8 REASONS OF CHOOSING RICKSHAW PULLING OCCUPATION

In the poor economic context of Bangladesh there is a surplus of labour force. In this case informal sector as well as rickshaw pulling is an effective source of employment in Bangladesh [6]. On the other hand, this occupation does not require any specialization and it is an easy way to get quick cash earning and employment [2]. From the survey (Fig. 2), it is found that 56% of the rickshaw pullers report that rickshaw pulling provides greater source of income and employment opportunities. The next most common reason is more freedom in this occupation (14%). About 4% of the rickshaw pullers mention that lack of job opportunity in his native village is the main reason of choosing this occupation.



*Fig. 2 Reasons for Choosing Rickshaw Pulling as a Profession*

## 5 CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that most of the rickshaw pullers have come from the rural poor society and it is an easy way for rural poor to escape themselves from extreme poverty. The cycle rickshaw as an informal activity has a significant effect on our national economy and it is a way of transferring money from the middle class to the poorest class. But the social stigma related to rickshaw puller makes the rickshaw pullers lives more miserable. This occupation does not make their life economically sufficient in long run. On the other hand, the contribution of this sector in generating income and employment has not been sufficiently appreciated. But if the government takes initiative to abolish the social stigma and given its positive role in the economy then the contribution of this sector will be significantly appreciated. So, government should take steps to improve this sector and make attention to those people who are involved in this sector to earn their live.

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