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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND OTHER LIVING CONDITIONS OF SLUM DWELLERS IN KOLKATA

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Abstract

Socio-economic condition denotes the position of an individual in the society. Slums in Kolkata began in British Colonial era during the period of industrialisation and urbanisation but other reasons of slums expansion are war, partition, population expansion etc. Slums are seen almost in every city. This study recognizes the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions i.e. poor annual income, low paid jobs, poor housing condition, inadequate living rooms, low education level etc. of slum dwellers in Kolkata. The study was conducted among 822 slum dwellers from 200 households and qualitative survey research method was adopted. This study reveals that 78% households have income of below one lakh and they have chosen low paid jobs because of their low education. Most of households have not adequate living rooms, separate latrines or separate kitchen rooms. The study also recommends some initiatives to dissolve the challenges e.g. increase income, provision of formal settlement, provision for skill-based training, opportunities for more education, periodical health check-up etc.

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Introduction:-

Socio-economic condition comprises economic and sociological assessment of an individual or a family. It is a comprehensive indicator of an individual's or a family's financial resources, social position, job history (Sonam, 2024). A Socio-economic assessment highlights specific realities like family's structure, income of family, job history, property ownership, housing condition, level of education, health & awareness etc. According to Salgotra and Roma (2018) socio-economic status of family determines the level of quality of education of the family members. Socio-economic status significantly impacts the overall development and health of communities (Koley, 2025). In the context of socio-economic status of slum dwellers in Kolkata reveals substantial challenges of those group as well as areas requiring improvement.

A slum is an informal settlement in an urban area characterized by sub-standard living and working conditions, lack of sanitation, clean water and other basic services (Gul, 2015). It represents a habitat unit with defective physical, social and economic living conditions (Bose, 2016). Slums are found in vacant land or government's land, under the over-head-bridges, besides canals and streets or near to industrial areas. The slum houses are typically made of bamboo, tin shed, straw leaves, polythene (Bhardwaj & Pandey, 2021). Slum is one of the persistent global problems. It seen not only in third world countries but in developed countries also. Slums punctuate almost every city of world.

It is a universal phenomenon accompanying with urban growth (Subasinghe, 2015). According to United Nations one third of urban dwellers live in slums. United Nation's sustainable development goal (SDG 11) emphasises on ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrading slums by 2030. But, slums are expanding because of economic inequality and issues with governance (Rajalakshmy, Deepthi, Dhansuri, Harini, Sindhu & Kamil, 2025). Slums occurred due to various factors mainly shortage of developed land for urban poor, large influx of population, rural migration to cities in search of jobs and health facilities, inadequate provision of basic amenities and infrastructural facilities in the urban areas (Sufaira, 2013).

Literature Review:-

Raghav & Joshi (2019) conducted a study on slum in Gurgaon, Haryana and stated that slums had started in the period of urbanization and industrialization. Migration of rural people towards urban areas creates a non-inclusive pattern and rapid growth in urbanization is the main reason for slum expansion. In the surveyed area female illiteracy was found higher than male illiteracy as well as participation in education is also higher in male than female. There were availabilities of electricity, drinking water, garbage disposal, road but missing found on latrine facility, proper drainage of water etc. Their monthly income was not exceeded than Rs. 15000/- and they received their earning money even after 6-8 months later after providing services. This leads to poor socio-economic conditions of slum dwellers. The government has to provide proper shelter and financial support to improve the standard of living of those people.

Anand (2019) conducted a study in Kalvankarai slums in Chennai city and stated that the dwellers of that slum were dissatisfied in their occupations, economical lives, housing conditions, family lives, health, social and community lives also. They have chosen various anti-social activities like crime, theft, burglary, drug-abuse etc. Motivation towards works or activities by sharing of knowledges and experiences of experts, provision of attending to school instead of engaging in work and providing attractive and joyful environment to school will be helpful for those under privileged children.

Tiwari & Singh (2021) conducted a study which focused on slums of Delhi where 84% children were going to school with the challenges of poverty, noisy environment, presence of alcoholic at home, conflicts at home, single room house etc. Defective procedure of instruction in school, insensitive mind set of teacher toward slum children, difficulty in some specific subjects, early demise of parent, bad company etc. are responsible for drop out of children of the study area. The researchers suggested to every Indian to be concerned for these children along with government policies.

Razia (2021) considered poverty, domestic work, looking after younger siblings, non-availability of school, health problem etc. are responsible for never enrolment in school and the researcher also pointed poverty, distance of school from home, poor facilities in school, attitude of teachers, medium of teaching, poor academic performance, lack of interest etc. are reasons for dropping out school among the children of Aligarh city. The researcher stated to draw attention from various stake holders and to provide more opportunities in socio-economic and educational aspects to the slum children.

Sonam (2024) conducted a study on slum dwellers in Shramvihar, New Delhi and found that due to lack of necessary educational credentials, they can't to involve in any activities that generated sufficient income. They have some unhealthy habits also. Majority of the participant earn minimum pay which is quite low for their families to subsist on. Lack of money, unemployment and some harmful behaviours were major features among those slum dwellers. The researcher suggested for more attention of government on those people.

Koley (2025) conducted a study and linked between annual income level and occupation, education, housing type, family size and distance of house from main road, linked between education and occupation. The researcher stated for targeted interventions to improve education, employment opportunities, housing and basic services in Darjeeling's urban slums.

Rationale of the Study:-

Urbanization began in Kolkata in early 17th century during British colonial era and slums were sprouted simultaneously with urbanization. The development of a city is associated with development of its slum people also. Though the condition of slum dwellers has improved than their beginning state but still it has remained in backward.

This study will focus the challenges of Socio-economic and other-living conditions of slum dwellers in Kolkata and provide some recommendations to dissolve their problems.

Objectives of the Study:-

1. To know the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions of slum dwellers in Kolkata.
2. To determine the factors that contribute to decrease the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions of slum dwellers in Kolkata.

Research Question:-

- Q. 1. What are the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions of slum dwellers in Kolkata?
- Q. 2. What are the factors that contribute to decrease the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions of slum dwellers in Kolkata?

Methodology:-

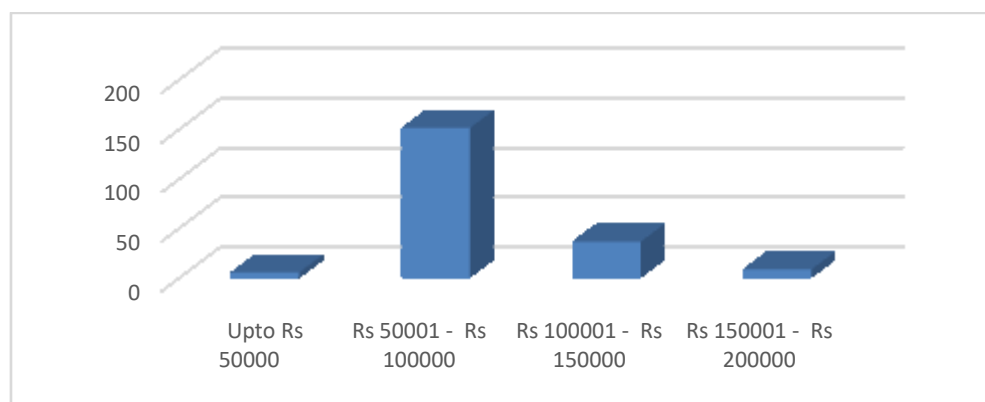
This study determines to analyse the challenges of Socio-economic and other living conditions of Slum dwellers in Kolkata. Qualitative Survey Research method was adopted for this study. The researcher has assumed random sampling technique to choose 200 families from slum areas in Kolkata. The participant and non-participant observations and interview methods were conducted in the study. The collected data were analysed and interpreted by qualitative content analysis method.

Data Analysis and Findings:-

Poor Annual Income:-

Table No.-1: Distribution of Annual income of the Slum Households

Annual Income	Frequency	Percentage
Upto Rs 50000	5	2.5
Rs 50001 - Rs 100000	151	75.5
Rs 100001 - Rs 150000	36	18
Rs 150001 - Rs 200000	8	4
Total	200	100



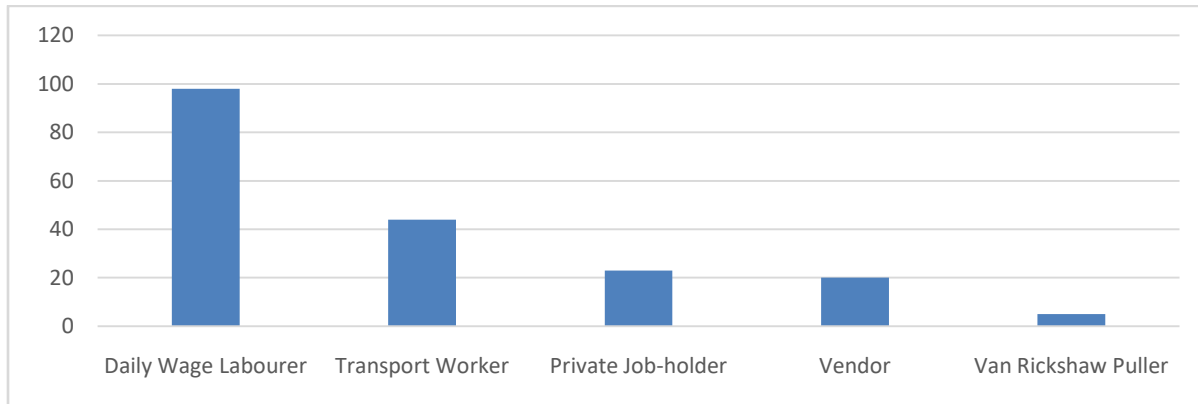
Analysis of the data presented in the above table reveals that 2.5% of respondent households have an income below Rs. 50,000/-; 75.5% families have income between Rs. 50,001 to Rs 100,000/-; 18% families have income between Rs. 100,001 to Rs 1,50,000/- and only 4% families earn above Rs 1,50,000/-.

Low Paid Job:-

Table No.-2: Distribution of Occupation of Respondent Fathers

Occupation of Fathers	Frequency	Percentage
Daily Wage Labourer	98	51.58
Transport Worker	44	23.16

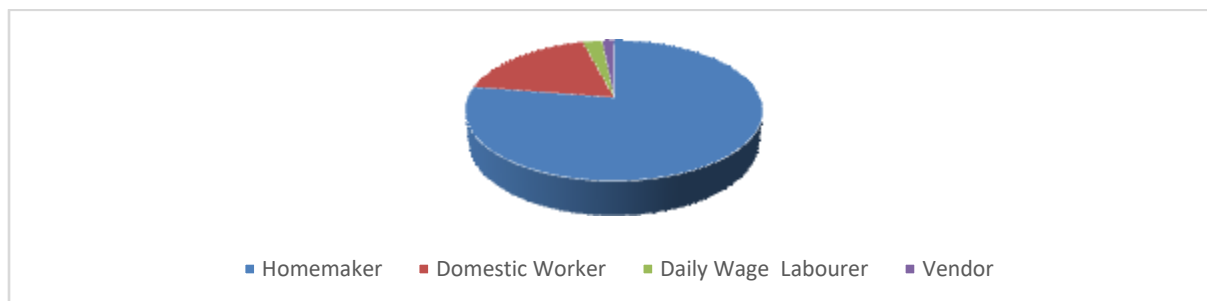
Private Job-holder	23	12.1
Vendor	20	10.53
Van Rickshaw Puller	5	2.63
Total	190	100



The above table shows that among the respondent fathers daily wage labourer are 51.58%, Van rickshaw pullers are 2.63% while vendors are 10.53%.

Table No.-3: Distribution of Occupation of Respondent Mothers

Occupation of Mother	Frequency	Percentage
Homemaker	152	77.55
Domestic Worker	36	18.37
Daily Wage Labourer	5	2.55
Vendor	3	1.53
Total	196	100

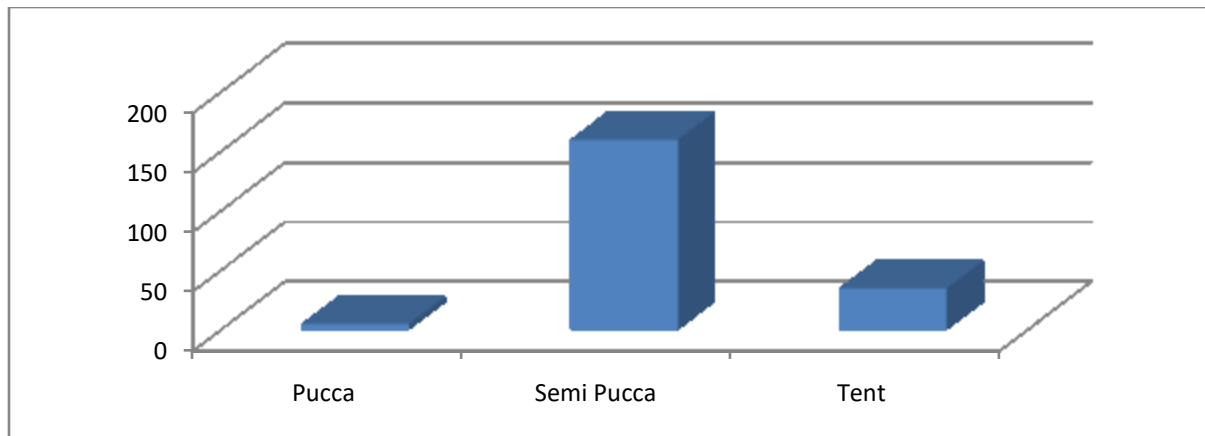


An analysis of the data presented in the above table reveals that 77.55% of respondent mothers are home maker and 22.45% of respondent mothers work as domestic worker, daily wage labourer and vendor.

Poor Housing Condition:-

Table No.-4: Distribution of Housing Condition of Respondent Slum Family

Housing Condition	Frequency	Percentage
Pucca	5	2.5
Semi Pucca	160	80
Tent	35	17.5
Total	200	100

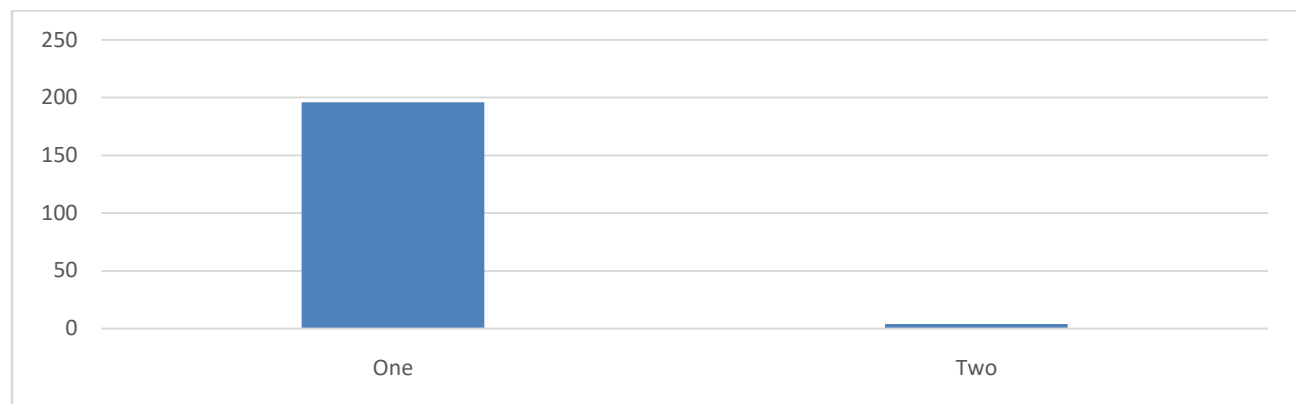


The above table represents that 80% houses of slum dwellers are Semi pucca and 17.5 % families live in Tent and only 2.5% houses are Pucca.

Inadequate Living Rooms:-

Table No.-5 Distribution of Living Rooms of Slum Dwellers

Rooms	Frequency	Percentage
One	196	98
Two	4	2

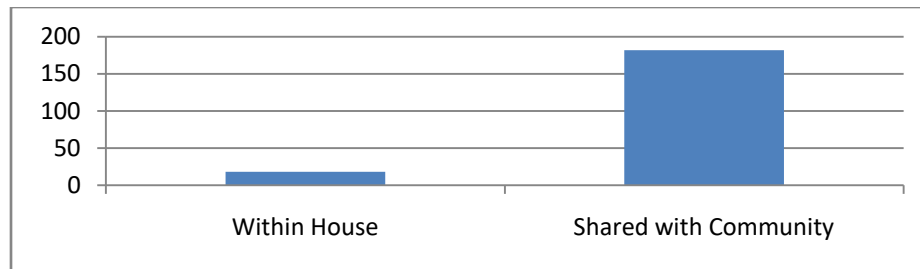


The above table indicates that 98% of respondent slum families live in single room and only 2% families live in two rooms.

Uses of Sanitation:-

Table No.-6 Distribution of Uses of Sanitation

Sanitation	Frequency	Percentage
Within House	18	9
Shared with Community	182	91
Total	200	100

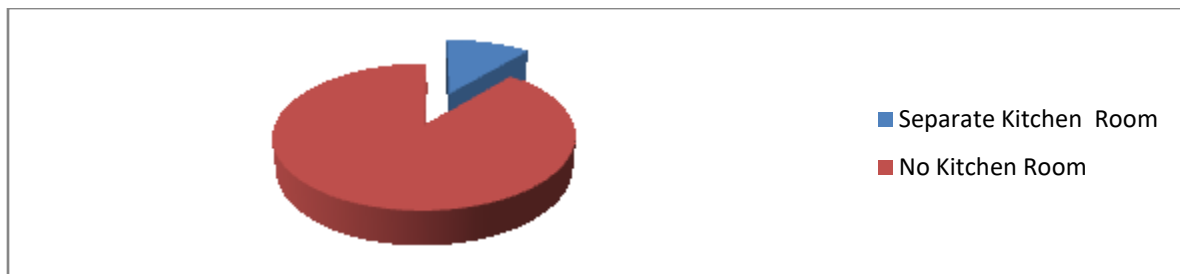


The above table shows that 9% families have latrine facilities within their houses and 91% families use community latrines.

No Separate Kitchen Room:-

Table No.-7 Distribution of Kitchen Room of Slum Dwellers

Kitchen Room	Frequency	Percentage
Separate Kitchen Room	22	11
No Kitchen Room	178	89
Total	200	100

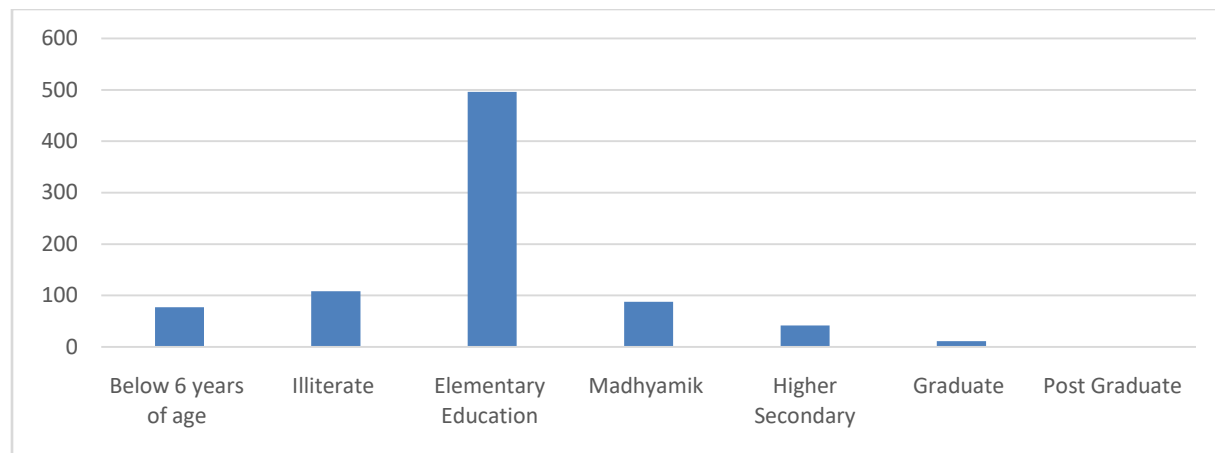


The above table indicates 11% houses have separate kitchen room while 89% houses have no kitchen room.

Low Education Level:-

Table No.-8 Distribution of Education of Slum Dwellers

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Below 6 years of age	77	9.37
Illiterate	108	13.14
Elementary Education	496	60.34
Madhyamik	88	10.70
Higher Secondary	42	5.11
Graduate	11	1.34
Post Graduate	0	0
Total	822	100



Analysis of the data presented in the above table reveals that 60.34% of respondents have Elementary Education while 1.34% possess a Graduate degree.

Recommendation to dissolve the challenges:-

In consultation with a group of research experts and social workers, the following recommendations are suggested to decrease the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions of slum dwellers in Kolkata:

Increase income:-

Slum dwellers earn too little to run their families. So, provision of increase income will help them to run their families smoothly and provision of job security will secure their earning. Opportunity for number of working days, increase payment against their work and scope of more work will be helpful for them. Provision for loan with minimum interest will be helpful for those backward people. The loan amount will be invested in growing their capital e.g. investment in small business or home based handicraft making or others.

Provision of Formal Settlement:-

Arrangement of formal settlement will reduce their stressor regarding shelter and increase their self-esteem and their identity and secure their right to safe shelter.

Provision of adequate rooms and spaces:-

The slum dwellers live in sub-human environment due to their meagre income. They live four to six family members together in a single room even. It is entirely seen that no separate kitchen was present in their living spaces. They use their bedroom as kitchen and store room also. Sometimes small adjoining places with their living area are used as bathroom. So provision of enough spaces and rooms according to their family members will provide them comfort, privacy and enough ventilation that is needed for good health.

Provision for skill-based training:-

Slum dwellers are basically low educated, so skill based training and vocational training will be effective for them.

Opportunities for more education:-

The slum dwellers prioritize to earning rather than education. So more opportunities of education to be provided beyond their working times. More access for open and distance education and remedial classes to be provided specially for them. Due to low education and knowledge deficit the slum dwellers are not aware about all scholarships provided by the government. So slum dwellers would be guided properly regarding different scholarships and schemes for developing education and schemes for social and financial support.

Periodical health check-up:-

The environments of slums are filthy and low-landed. Hence the dwellers often suffer from different health problems. If periodical health campaigns are organised they may be beneficial.

Discussion:-

The present study was conducted to find the challenges of socio-economic and other living conditions faced by the slum dwellers in Kolkata. The data shows that incomes of slum dwellers are too little that they are forced to live in slum areas and can't be free from slum lives. Slums are mainly created due to poverty and poverty is responsible for low standard of living life (Raut,2018). A greater portion (78%) of slum dwellers earn below rupees one lakh annually that is also similar to Raut, Sonam, Koley, et.al. So they run their families with too difficulties. They do mainly labour works those follow no work no pay rules. They choose their work as daily wage labourers, vendors, van rickshaw pullers etc. and female dwellers mainly work as domestic maid. They choose these low-paid jobs for their low education. They have no provision to work regularly and earn enough, especially in monsoon. Sometimes they work in too little payment or they receive their earning money even after 6-8 months later after providingservices (Raghav and Joshi, 2019). Therefore, poverty is always present with them and indebtedness accompanied to them.

People migrated from rural to urban for better livelihood. But due to poor capital they live in slums. Raghav and Joshi (2019) also observed that one-fourth households of Gurgaon, Haryana chose to live in slum due to poverty. They occupy empty places or government's land to build houses or make tent. Sometimes, they take rented rooms with their poor money to those areas where basic amenities of living are already lacked. They have no ownership on their lands or on their rooms. They have no permanent and safe shelter. Every individual needs to protect his life from thieves or natural stressors and for this house is necessary for everyone (Sufaira, 2013). Most of the houses of the surveyed areas are semi-pucca or pucca those are mainly rented and some families live in tent those are made with wood, board, nylon etc. Most of the families live in single room that also observed by Sufaira(2013) in Kannur Municipality and they have no separate kitchen room that hampers in cross ventilation into the rooms and damp rooms create some respiratory problems like asthma, tuberculosis etc. 91% slum households share community latrines which are not appropriate for hygiene. Poor sanitary condition and poor quality of water lead to illness (Sufaira,2013). Some common health issues are seen frequently among them, such as worm infestation, diarrhoea etc.

It is seen that the level of education is better among slum children than their parent-generation as they realise the importance of education and sending their children to school. But poverty is the main issue to get education and in the other hand low education can't to free them from their slum life. To improve the socio economic and other living condition among slum dwellers, their income to be increased first. Provision for more work and increase number of working days will increase their income. The government must assist and inspire more private entrepreneurs to generate more economic activities that can deliver better improvements of their socio-economic status (Mistri, Das & Bhakat, 2025). The government have to arrange for formal resettlement with all basic amenities to improve their livelihood. As the slum dwellers give more priority to earning than getting education; so skill based training and vocational training should be accessible for vulnerable population (Amjad, 2025) and opportunities to work after completion of training is more acceptable to them.

Conclusion:-

Slums are the result of urbanization and industrialization usually resulting from the process of rural to urban migration and poor income of urban people for livelihood. These low income groups have no proper shelter and chosen to settle in slum areas characterized by overcrowds dilapidated housing and though they have availability of some amenities like electricity, drinking water, roads, hospital etc. but other amenities like latrine facility, proper drainage, cleanliness etc. have missing. To improve the living conditions of slum peoples, the government has a great role. They need resettlement does not mean they need fancy building, it means they have to resettle in formal and organised habitation where basic urban amenities will be available to maintain a certain standard of life.

Cleaning of roads, drainage and canals should be periodical and monitored. Garbage disposal to be removed every day. The slum peoples are usually illiterate or low educated. So arrangements of basic education for elder persons and awareness regarding educating to children, availability of government's different policies and schemes for education will improve their lives. They have to teach about personal hygiene as well as environmental hygiene. So that they would be aware about their own health and keep the environment clean and safe. Government and non-government organizations, social workers, young generation have to come ahead to develop the living conditions as well as socio-economic condition of the slum people as development of slums do not mean only the development of slums but also the development of the city as a whole.

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