



RESEARCH TRENDS IN **MULTIDISCIPLINARY SUBJECTS** VOL-4

EDITED BY

Sruthi S, Dr. Nitu Maurya, Dr. Manikandan Iyer,
Dr. Kumar Ratnesh, Dr. P. Karthikesan

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VOLUME 4

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*by: Sruthi S, Dr. Nitu Maurya, Dr. Manikandan Iyer, Dr. Kumar Ratnesh,
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CHAPTER 28

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE AUTO-RICKSHAW COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY OF ALAGAPPANAGAR GRAMA PANCHAYAT, KERALA

Mr. Nijil Jacobi

ABSTRACT

The term COVID-19 becomes a common say in our day today life. It's close to two years since COVID-19 had problems with us. It shook the economy, business, movement moreover the life of all. The problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic are not over today. Although vaccination against the pandemic is progressing in the country, the continuing second wave and threat of third wave of COVID-19 along with its novel variations are causing a lot of concern. The problems caused by COVID-19 on their livelihood continue unabated. The pandemic has greatly affected the lives of common people of India. The majority of the people and the poor in India are either daily wage earners or working in the unorganized sector. The case of auto-rickshaw drivers during COVID-19 also has a serious concern. Auto-rickshaws or three-wheelers have an important role in the mobility of both rural and urban population. The rickshaws are also known as the vehicle of poor in India. The COVID-19 related issues and strict lockdown measure taken by the Government created pandemonium in their daily earnings and their life. People who resorted auto-rickshaws for their indispensable requirements also confronted with lots of issues. This paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the auto-drivers of Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat in Kerala.

Keywords: *Auto-rickshaw, COVID-19, economy, income, livelihood*

INTRODUCTION

Auto-rickshaws or three-wheelers have an important role in the mobility of both rural and urban population. The rickshaws are also known as the vehicle of poor in India. These are one of the cheapest modes of commutation. People use this mode of transportation for short and medium distance travels both in rural and urban area. Being the most common mode of transportation, there were many rickshaws in every nook and corner of urban area and also in rural area. The on-going pandemic COVID-19 distorted the livelihood of the dependents of auto-rickshaws and also the auto-drivers. After the voluntary public curfew on 22nd March 2020, India moved towards a nationwide lockdown for three weeks on 24th March 2020, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion Indian populations as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the situations become normal in the country day by day, some of the regions of the nation still follow the lockdown regulations due to the uncertain and uncontrollable outbreak of COVID-19 cases. Many people lost their jobs and livelihoods because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the strict lockdown measures. The daily wage earners and the poor working in the unorganized sector suffered the most. The condition of the rickshaw drivers were also the same. Food kits provided by the Kerala Government during lockdowns helped alleviate hunger but still needed money for their other needs. A job that provides a steady income is still a chore for the rural poor. Unlike the salaried employees, they only get wage when they go to work. Such issues in the unorganized sector are causing a lot of misery in their lives. There is a significant amount of income loss for rural households; loss of livelihoods for small and marginal farmers, landless families, and daily wage earners which has further compounded into thrusting them into severe poverty, unfavourable compromises and ill health. During these lockdown restrictions people who resorted auto-rickshaws for their indispensable requirements also confronted with lots of issues. This paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the auto-drivers of Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat in Kerala.

OBJECTIVES

- ✓ To analyse the socio-economic conditions of the auto-rickshaw drivers of Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat.
- ✓ To examine the effect of COVID-19 on their livelihood and income.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research is conducted among the daily wage earners who are residing at Alagappanagar village. Primary data are collected from 30 selected auto-rickshaw drivers through a structured interview schedule. Secondary statistics are collected from newspapers, articles, publications, journals and from various internet sources to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the auto-rickshaw drivers in India.

LIMITATIONS

- ✓ One of the biggest constraints was communication with faced mask and COVID-19 protocols.
- ✓ Couldn't get sufficient time to spend with the respondents and sometimes they were uncooperative.
- ✓ On many occasion the respondents did not provide correct information regarding monthly income.

Description of the Panchayat

Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat is situated in Amballur Villages in Mukundapuram Taluk of Thrissur District, Kerala. Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat comes under Kodakara Block Panchayat and Pudukkad Assembly constituency. It is just 12.7 kilometres away from the Thrisur City. The area of the Grama Panchayat is 18.38 sq. kilometers. There are 17 wards in Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat. The people in this region are engaged in agriculture, dairy farming and allied activities, small scale industries, self-employments, blue collar jobs etc.

Basic Profile of the Panchayat**Table - 1**

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| Total population | 26985 |
| Male | 12875 |
| Female | 14110 |
| Density of Population | 1030 |
| Sex Ratio | 1096 |
| Literacy Rate | 93.08 |
| No. of Families | 7353 |
| Area in Sq.Km | 18.38 |
| Latitude | 10.2102351 |
| Longitude | 76.2623815 |
| Tehsil/ Taluk | Mukundapuram |
| District | Thrissur |
| State | Kerala |

Source: Secondary Data

Socio-economic background of the sample population

For conducting the study of the impact of COVID-19 on auto-rickshaw drivers, 30 samples were randomly selected from the different auto-stands of Alagappanagar Grama Panchayat.

Age composition of the sample**Table - 2**

| Age category | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Below 30 | 2 | 6.7 % |
| 30-39 | 9 | 30 % |
| 40-49 | 14 | 46.7 % |
| 50 and Above | 5 | 16.6 % |
| Total | 30 | 100 % |

Source: Primary Data

The Table - 2 highlights the age-wise classification of the sample. Majority of the sample population belongs to the age group

of 40-49 years (46.7 percent) and 30-39 years (30 percent). 50 and above age group constitutes 16.6 percent and below 30 constitutes 6.7 percent.

Classification on the basis of ownership of the rickshaws

Table - 3

| Ownership | Number | Percentage |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Owned | 23 | 76.67 % |
| Rented | 7 | 23.33 % |
| Total | 30 | 100 % |

Source: Primary Data

The above Table – 3 shows the classification of the sample on the basis of the ownership of the rickshaws. Majority of them (76.67 percent) are autorickshaw drivers-cum-owners. While about 23.33 percent of them use rented auto-rickshaws that are owned by someone else.

Daily income they earned before COVID-19 lockdown

Table - 4

| Daily income (in rupees) | Total | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Below 400 | 2 | 6.7 % |
| 400 - 600 | 9 | 30 % |
| 600 - 800 | 13 | 43.3 % |
| 800 Above | 6 | 20 % |
| Total | 30 | 100 % |

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows the daily income earned by the sample before COVID-19 lockdown. Only two workers had the daily income less than ₹ 400. Lion portion of the sample, that is, 43.3 percent of them received a daily income between ₹ 600 - ₹ 800,

followed by 30 percent of the sample who received a daily income between ₹ 400 - ₹ 600. 20 percent of them received more than 800 rupee per day

Daily income they earn after COVID-19 lockdown

Table - 5

| Daily income (in rupees) | Total | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-------|------------|
| No income | 18 | 60 % |
| Below 400 | 12 | 40 % |
| 400 - 600 | 0 | - |
| 600 - 800 | 0 | - |
| 800 Above | 0 | - |
| Total | 30 | 100 % |

Source: Primary Data

The above Table – 5 highlights the classification of the sample on the basis of daily income they earn after COVID-19 lockdown. 60 percent of them have received no income after COVID-19 lockdown. Only 40 percent of them received a meagre sum which was less than 300 rupees per day even though it comes under below 400 rupee classification.

Classification on the basis of COVID-19 infection

Table - 6

| COVID-19 cases | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| COVID-19 infected | 13 | 43.33 % |
| COVID-19 not infected | 17 | 56.67 % |
| Total | 50 | 100 % |

Source: Primary Data

The above Table – 6 shows the classification of the sample on the basis of COVID-19 infection. 13 among them were tested COVID-19 positive. Four among them were seriously affected. 17 among them are safe and 8 of them tested COVID-19 negative after quarantine days due to COVID-19 contacts.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- ✓ Alagappanagar Panchayat is highly densely populated (1030 sq km) than the state average (860 sq km).
- ✓ Villagers of Alagappanagar Panchayat use auto-rickshaws as a common mode of transportation.
- ✓ Majority of the sample population belongs to the age group of 40-49 years (46.7 percent) and 30-39 years (30 percent). 50 and above age group constitutes 16.6 percent and below 30 constitutes 6.7 percent.
- ✓ 76.67 percent of them are autorickshaw drivers-cum-owners. While about 23.33 percent of them use rented auto-rickshaws that are owned by someone else.
- ✓ Majority of the sample had a decent daily income before the COVID-19 lockdowns. Only two workers had the daily income less than ₹ 400. Lion portion of the sample, that is, 43.3 percent of them received a daily income between ₹ 600 - ₹ 800, followed by 30 percent of the sample who received a daily income between ₹ 400 - ₹ 600. 20 percent of them received more than 800 rupee per day.
- ✓ The findings related to the income after COVID-19 lockdown measures were alarming. 60 percent of them have received no income after COVID-19 lockdown! Only 40 percent of them received a meagre sum which was less than 300 rupees per day. They opined that their living conditions were pathetic after the lockdown measures.
- ✓ Even though they were not using the auto-rickshaws during the lockdown situations, they were forced to pay the tax and insurances to maintain their rickshaws. It added fuel to their

livelihood since they were not getting any income from their auto-rickshaws.

- ✓ The ban on movement of vehicles in the state lead to battery drain, inoperative engines and other defects to their rickshaws. Thus, majority of them opined that they had to approach mechanics and had to incur a lot to run their rickshaws.
- ✓ Increasing fuel price is also a major concern to them.
- ✓ It was found that 13 among them were tested COVID-19 positive. Four among them were seriously affected. 17 among them are safe and 8 of them tested COVID-19 negative after quarantine days due to COVID-19 contacts. Most of them had contacts from their auto-passengers who tested COVID positive.
- ✓ Those who were tested COVID positive among them said that it was very difficult to move on their life because of lack of income. But the free COVID-19 treatment by the Kerala Government helped them a lot to handle the expenses incurred other than their personal expenditures.
- ✓ Quarantine and sitting in COVID-19 observation situations created fear and other related issues like lack of quarantine facility, sequester by the neighbours made a few respondents' living conditions even tragic.
- ✓ Even though a few respondents faced certain issues as said above, Community Kitchen initiative by the Kerala Government through the Local Self Government Department (LSGD) with the support of Self Help Groups (SHGs) like Kudumbasree has provided free meals to the poor families in their region. Majority of the auto-drivers availed such benefits. They also provided services to those who are in quarantine, isolation and self-observation in the panchayat.
- ✓ Distributing food kits to all ration card holders in the Kerala state helped the poor daily-wage earners to solve their problem of hunger. Majority of the respondents positively

commented on this novel initiative by the Kerala government in this crisis situation.

- ✓ Government, panchayat, NGOs, political parties, church, volunteer organizations and youngsters were active to help the needy during times of crisis. They provided free meals, quarantine facilities, hospital services and medicines to the people in the panchayat.
- ✓ Regional Cooperative Bank of Alagappanagar provided credit facility to the people in the panchayat. One family member was provided with 25,000 rupee loan facility at 5% rate of interest. Repayment clauses were relaxed due to severe lockdown in the state.
- ✓ Even after the relaxations of COVID-19 lockdown measures, the daily income of the auto-rickshaw drivers are not up to the mark. They opine that the number of passengers they previously had, has a drastic decline since people are highly concerned about personal hygiene and security. They say that most of their regular passengers are relying on their own personal vehicles and non-functioning of schools and colleges sharply reduced their number of passengers and it rigorously affected on their income.

CONCLUSION

Auto-rickshaws essentially give first and last-mile network to public vehicle frameworks, as rural railroads, metro rail routes, and territorial transport benefits similar to a reasonable and efficient portability choice. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting strict lockdown measures have affected the wellbeing, career, and livelihood of individuals across all areas. The spread of the COVID-19 described by its speed, scale, seriousness, and cultural and monetary interruption has excessively affected the existences of poor people especially rural poor. Auto-rickshaws or three-wheelers have an important role in the mobility of both rural and urban population. The rickshaws are also known as the vehicle of poor in India. These are one of the cheapest modes of commutation. People

use this mode of transportation for short and medium distance travels both in rural and urban area. Being the most common mode of transportation, there were many rickshaws in every nook and corner of urban area and also in rural area. But the things have a serious setback now. India is momentarily observing a reduction in the number of COVID-19 outbreaks. Even after the phase-wise removal of lockdown in the nation, the standard clients feel awkward to get back to common travel by virtue of staying away from the driver. Sharing or offering rides to different travellers is a thing of the past now. The study in the Alagappanagar panchayat was alarming in these drastic situations of lockdown. Thanks to the Kerala Government, government bodies, NGOs, political parties, Social Help Groups, church, religious organizations, volunteer groups, rescue associations and youngsters for providing free food and other necessary services to the poor and needy in this hardship. The government has to relax the lockdown then to make the life of the common man normal. However, to survive than to live is more crucial now to have a better prospect in the coming days.

To pacify the impacts of COVID-19 on auto-rickshaw dependants the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways extended the validity of fitness, permit (all types), driving license, registration, or any other concerned documents whose extension of validity could or not likely be processed due to lockdown and which have expired since February 1, till June 30. State governments decided to support auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers by providing one-time compensation to each of them who is an auto-rickshaw license holder ranging from Rs 5000 to Rs 10000. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has granted a moratorium of two months for loan repayments in March 2020¹. All these measures will definitely help the auto-rickshaw dependants to manage their rickshaw related issues. But it is a fact that only when the situations get regular and all the business become normal, the livelihoods of the auto-drivers turn to be accustomed.

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