Understanding the embodiment of discrimination, stigma, and agency among waste workers in Shimla (India), and its impact on their health and well-being

Background

Waste work in India is deeply embedded with symbolic and practical manifestations of caste, gender, religion and class, with a majority of them belonging to historically oppressed communities.

Despite the social, economic and ecological importance of their work, waste workers are not given due recognition and continue to struggle under the pressures of poverty, stigma and compromised citizenship. They are discriminated against by way of their socio-economic background and occupation and are often viewed with suspicion and distrust, by the state and society.

Existing evidence and knowledge on waste workers in India is largely focused on the scientific treatment of waste and integrating waste workers into solid waste management systems. Research that explores and understands the more intimate aspects of their lives is hard to find. This research aims to bring forth the lived realities and experiences of waste workers.

Research Objectives

- To examine the practices of ‘dis/respect’ and its contextual influences, with a special focus on the intersections of gender, caste, class and religion and its effect on health and well-being.
- To explore understandings and practices of ‘discrimination’ and its quotidian manifestations in the lives of waste workers.
- To explore how waste workers cope with everyday discrimination and stigma, and understand its influence on their experiences of health and well-being.
- To investigate how discrimination, stigma and collectivisation affects waste workers’ ‘agency’ to access health services and their fundamental rights to health and dignity.

Methodology

- Participant Observation
- In-Depth Interviews & Life Histories
- Reflexive Diarising (Researcher)

Ethnographic Approach

Analytical Approach

Kathy Charmaz’s Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory Process

The UKRI GCRF Accountability for Informal Urban Equity Hub is a multi-country Hub with partners in the UK, Sierra Leone, India, Bangladesh and Kenya which we call ARISE. The Hub works with communities in slums and informal settlements to support processes of accountability related to health. It is funded through the UKRI Collective Fund.

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