



Livelihood Challenges and Socio-Economic Status of Migrant Auto-Rickshaw Drivers in Bhilad Taluka, Gujarat

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Abstract

This research article analyzes the socio-economic aspects to auto-rickshaw drivers in Bhilad Taluka of Valsad District, Gujarat, highlighting the problems they face and how these issues impact their livelihood.

A large section of India's population is employed in the informal sector, including auto-rickshaw driving. Auto-rickshaws, a common mode on public transportation in many urban areas, play a crucial role in the urban transport ecosystem. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic status of auto-rickshaw drivers, the challenges they encounter, and to identify possible measures for improving their living and working conditions. Auto-rickshaw drivers constitute an important yet often overlooked segment of urban transportation. This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, to explore the inequalities and difficulties present in their lives. This study examines key issues affecting this group, such as income disparity, unstable working conditions, lack of legal clarity, and social stigma. Preliminary findings reveal that most drivers have irregular incomes, insecure working environments, and are deprived of legal protection.

Keywords: Auto-Rickshaw Drivers, Informal Sector, Socio-Economic, Conditions, Bhilad, Valsad

Introduction

India's urban transport system relies heavily on informal modes of transportation, among which auto-rickshaws hold a prominent position. Especially in small towns and semi-urban areas like Bhilad Taluka of Valsad District in Gujarat, auto-rickshaw drivers serve as an essential link in ensuring affordable and accessible mobility for the public. Despite their vital contribution, these workers often remain on the margins of socio-economic development.

A significant portion of India's workforce is employed in the informal sector, lacking formal contracts, social security, and stable income. Auto-rickshaw drivers, as part of this sector, are frequently subjected to economic uncertainties, legal ambiguities, and social neglect. Their daily struggle includes not only earning a living through fluctuating passenger demand but also managing operational costs, health risks and occasional harassment from authorities.

This research seeks to analyze the socio-economic conditions of auto-rickshaw drivers in Bhilad Taluka by focusing on their income levels, monthly expenditures,

working hours, and the various personal and occupational challenges they face. Using a mixed-methods approach including surveys, interviews, and group discussions, the study aims to present a ground-level understanding to their livelihoods. Furthermore, it attempts to suggest practical policy measures that could improve their standard of living, ensure legal safeguards, and promote overall well-being.

Research Methodology

Problem Statement

Researcher is examining general understanding about age, educational status, monthly earning, monthly expenses, possession of auto, problem faces of respondents.

Major Rickshaw Stand in Bhilad Taluka

1. Bhilad railway station
2. Sarigam market
3. Manda Colony
4. Fansa Rickshaw Stand

Research Design: Descriptive Research Design, Interview Method.

Data Type: Primary Data

Sample Size: 60 respondents from four rickshaw stand of Bhilad Taluka

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the socio-economic status of auto-rickshaw drivers in Bhilad Taluka of Valsad District.
2. To identify the key challenges faced by auto-rickshaw drivers in their professional and personal lives.
3. To assess the pattern of income and expenditure among auto-rickshaw drivers.

General information

Table 1: Age Group of the Respondents

Sr No.	Age Group	Number of Auto Drivers	Percentage
1	18 to 25	12	20.00%
2	26 to 30	30	50.00%
3	31 to 35	8	13.33%
4	36 to 40	10	16.67%
Total		60	100%

Source: Based on field survey

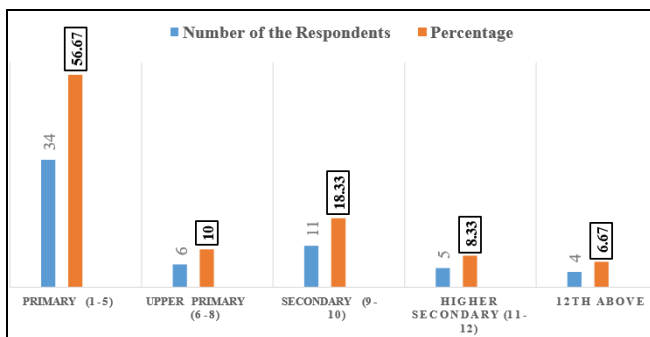


Fig 1: Age group of the respondents

The above table and graph shows that the total number of auto drivers between the ages of 18 to 25 is 12(20%), while the number of auto drivers between the ages of 26 and 30 is 30(50%). Additionally, there are 8(13.33%) auto drivers between the ages of 31 and 35, and 10(16.67%) auto drivers between the ages of 36 and 40.

Table 2: Educational Level of Auto-Rickshaw Drivers

Sr. No.	Educational Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Primary (1 to 5)	34	56.67
2	Upper Primary (6-8)	6	10
3	Secondary (9-10)	11	18.33
4	Higher Secondary (11-12)	5	8.33
5	Above 12 th	4	6.67
	Total	60	100

Source: Based on field Survey

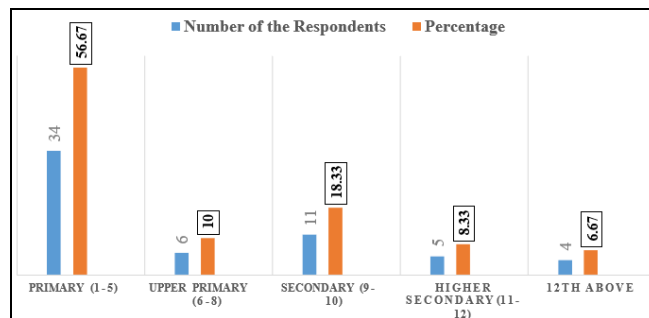


Fig 2: Educational Level of the Respondents

The above table and graph show that the highest percentage of rickshaw drivers, 56.67 percent have studied from 1st to 5th grade. Meanwhile, 18.33 percent of rickshaw drivers have studied up to 9th to 10th grade. Additionally, 10 percent have studied from 6th to 8th grade. The total percentage of rickshaw drivers who have studied from 11th 12th grade is 8.33 percent, while only 6.67 percent have studied beyond 12th grade.

Table 3: Causes for Auto Rickshaw Driving

Sr. No.	Reasons	Number of the Respondents	Percentage
1.	Poverty	23	38.33
2.	Unemployment	18	30.00
3.	Security Issues	4	6.67
4.	Family Burden	10	16.67
5.	Other Reason	5	8.33
	Total	60	100

Source: Based on Field Survey

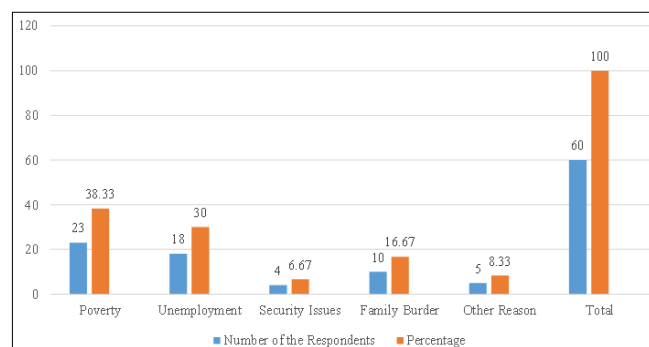


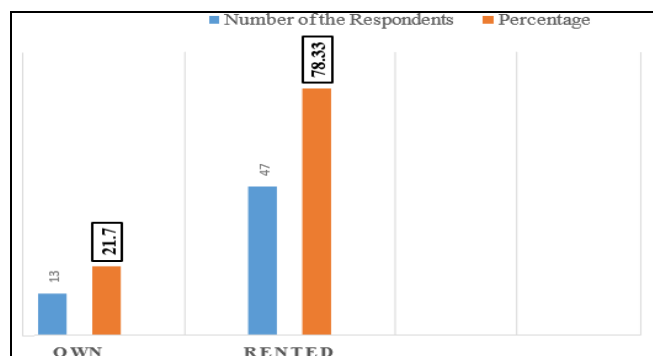
Fig 3: Reason for migration

The above table and graph shows that poverty is the most significant factor, with 23 respondents (38.33%) citing it as the main reason for their migration. The second most prominent reason is unemployment, according for 18 respondents (30%). This indicates a strong correlation between lack of job opportunities in rural or semi-urban areas and the decision to migrate. 8.33 percent of the respondents identified other reasons for migration, which may include access to better infrastructure, education, healthcare, or the influence of previously migrated acquaintances and relatives.

Table 4: Possession of Auto

Sr. No.	Status	Number of the Respondents	Percentage
1.	Own	13	21.67
2.	Rented	47	78.33
Total	-	60	100

Source: Based on Field Survey

**Fig 4:** Possession of auto

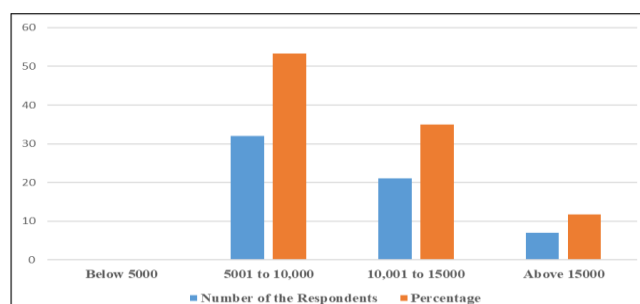
The above table and graph shows that 78.33 percent of auto drivers operate rented rickshaws, while 21.67 percent of drivers own their own rickshaws.

Economic Problem Faces Auto Rickshaw Drivers

Rickshaw drivers encounter various challenges; however, the most significant among them is financial instability. Their earning is inconsistent- there are days when they earn well, and others when they earn nothing. Simultaneously, they bear multiple expenses, which often create hardships for both the drivers and families. Hence, this study aims to gather detailed information regarding their average monthly income and expenditure.

Table 5: Monthly Earning of Auto Rickshaw Drivers

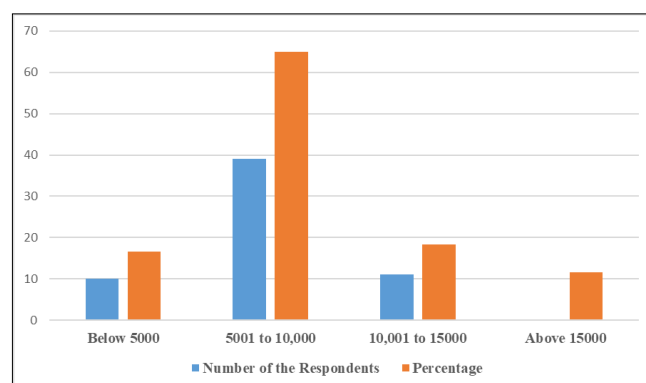
Sr. No.	Monthly Earning	Number of the Respondents	Percentage
1.	Below 5000	0	00
2.	5001 to 10,000	32	53.33
3.	10,001 to 15000	21	35.00
4.	Above 15000 rupees	07	11.67
Total		60	100

**Fig 5:** Monthly Earning of Auto Rickshaw Drivers

From the above table and graph, it is shows that out of the total 60 respondents, not a single person earns less than 5000 rupees per month. A total of 32 individuals earn between 5001 to10,000 while 21 individuals have a monthly income between 10,001 to 15000. Additionally, there are 7 respondents whose monthly income exceeds 15000 rupees.

Table 6: Monthly Expenses of Auto Rickshaw Drivers

Sr No.	Monthly Expenses	Number of the Respondents	Percentage
1.	Below 5000	10	16.67
2.	5001 to 10,000	39	65.00
3.	10,001 to 15000	11	18.33
4.	Above 15000 rupees	00	00
Total		60	100

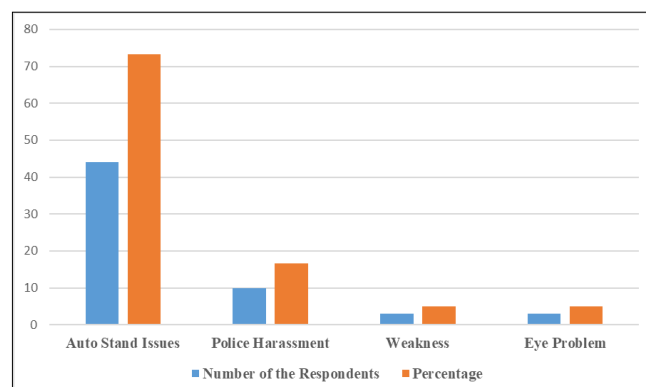
**Fig 6:** Monthly Expenses of Auto Rickshaw Drivers

The above table and graph presents data regarding the monthly expenses of 60 auto rickshaw drivers. It reveals that the majority of drivers (65%) fall in the expenditure range of 5001 to10,000, indicating that this is the most common monthly spending bracket among the respondents. Additionally, 16.67 percent of the drivers spend less than 5000 rupees per month, while 18.33 percent incur monthly expenses between 10001 and 15000. Notably, none of the respondents reported expenses above 15000 per month, suggesting a consistent upper limit in their spending behavior.

This data reflects that most rickshaw drivers maintain their monthly expenditure within a modest range, possibly due to limited income and efforts to balance family and operational costs.

Table 7: Problem Faced by Auto Rickshaw Drivers

Sr. No.	Problem faced by	Number of the Respondents	Percentage
1.	Auto Stand Issues	44	73.33
2.	Police Harassment	10	16.67
3.	Weakness	03	5.00
4.	Eye Problem	03	5.00
Total		60	100

**Fig 7:** Problem Faced by Auto Rickshaw Drivers

The above table highlights the key problems faced by auto rickshaw drivers, out of 60 respondents, the majority 73.33 percent reported issues related to auto stand, such as lack of space or mismanagement. Around 16.67 percent of drivers faced police harassment, while 5 percent each reported health-related problems like general weakness and eye issues. This data reflects that infrastructural and external pressures are major concerns in their daily work life.

Findings

1. Majority of auto-rickshaw drivers earn between rupees 5000 to 15000 per month. None of the respondents reported earnings below rupees 5000, and only a small proportion earn above 15000.
2. A significant portion (around 78) of drivers operate rented vehicles, while only a minority own their own auto-rickshaws
3. Most drivers reported monthly expenses in the range of 5001 to 10000, suggesting a tight margin between income and expenditure.
4. The majority of respondents had an education level between 1st and 8th standard. Very few had completed secondary education or above.
5. Many drivers were unaware of their legal rights, government schemes, or health benefits, pointing to a lack of formal education and outreach.

Suggestions

1. **Improve the system of auto stands:** The local administration should provide proper and convenient auto stands so that drivers do not have to face the trouble of standing in disorder or unauthorized places.
2. **Control of Police Harassment:** The police and traffic department should treat drivers with respect. For this, practical training of police officers should be done from time to time.
3. **Health camps for drivers:** The government of NGOs should regularly organize free health check-up camps, in which problems related to eye examination and weakness can be resolved.
4. **Financial assistance and insurance scheme:** Special microfinance schemes, government subsidies, and health and life insurance scheme should be expanded for drivers.
5. **Education and awareness campaign:** Drivers should be given information related to legal rights, traffic rules, social behavior and health hygiene.

Limitations of the study

- The study was based on a small sample of 60 auto-rickshaw drivers, which may not fully represent the entire population of drivers in Bhilad Taluka or Valsad district.
- The researcher was confined to Bhilad Taluka, and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions with different socio-economic conditions.
- Due to inadequate government records on informal sector workers as the local level, secondary data support was limited.

Conclusion

The present study on auto rickshaw drivers in the Daman

area highlights the complex socio-economic conditions faced by this informal yet essential segment of urban transportation. The analysis reveals that a majority of drivers are engaged in rented vehicles, with limited income stability and substantial monthly expenses. Most respondents earn between 5000 to 15000 rupees per month, indicating modest livelihoods, often insufficient to meet family needs.

Furthermore, the drivers face multiple challenges such as lack of organized auto stands, police harassment, and health-related issues like physical weakness and eye problem. These issues, compound by long working hours and inadequate social security, reflect a vulnerable living condition. Despite their significant contribution to urban mobility and last-mile connectivity, auto rickshaw drivers in Vapi continue to remain socio-economically marginalized. The findings emphasize the need for better supportive government policies, better infrastructure, accessible healthcare, financial inclusion, and training in alternative employment skills to improve their quality of life and ensure sustainable livelihoods.

In conclusion, targeted interventions and inclusive development policies are essential to uplift the conditions of auto rickshaw drivers in Vapi and to acknowledge their role as vital contributors to the urban economy.

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