

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE WORKERS IN HARITHA KARMA SENA -A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THRISSUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) is a grassroots initiative in Kerala that significantly contributes to sustainable waste management through waste collection, segregation, and disposal, with the active participation of women and marginalized communities. The initiative has helped improve environmental cleanliness, reduce pollution, and generate livelihood opportunities at the local level. However, despite their crucial role, HKS workers face numerous challenges, including health and safety risks arising from inadequate protective equipment and insufficient training, low and irregular wages, lack of social security benefits, and poor infrastructure and basic amenities. Social stigma attached to sanitation work and limited public cooperation further increase their workload and cause psychological stress. The study conducted among 120 workers of Haritha karma sena in Thrissur district.

INTRODUCTION

With rising urban populations and increasing waste generation, managing solid waste has become a critical concern. In Kerala, improper waste handling leads to environmental degradation, pollution, and health hazards. To tackle this issue, the state launched the Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) under the Suchitwa Mission. This initiative is a people-centered model that engages green workers in collecting, segregating, and managing non-biodegradable waste. These workers also carry out public awareness campaigns to promote waste segregation and recycling at the sources.

HKS significantly contributes to reducing landfill waste and supports sustainable environmental practices. Despite their essential role, the workers face various problems such as poor wages, limited job security, inadequate protective gear, and minimal public appreciation. The physically demanding nature of the work worsens these challenges.

Nishad (2024) examines solid waste management practices in Kerala, India, with a focus on the strategies employed by Haritha Karma Sena. It aims to evaluate the impact of these strategies and identify factors influencing waste management in the region. Prasad (2024), explores the role, significance, issues, and challenges faced by women working as Solid Waste Management (SWM) workers in urban Kerala. It also evaluates whether the HKS system, operating under the Kudumbashree Mission the world's largest women empowerment initiatives functioning effectively, highlighting both its strengths and weaknesses. The study of Ravikumar (2024) examines the contributions of Haritha Karma Sena to waste management and sustainable development. The study also highlights the importance of addressing electronic waste, urging each Haritha Karma Sena unit to focus on various factors that contribute to sustainable development in their area.

The study of Shameerda and Sandhya (2024) investigates the "Role of Haritha Karma Sena in

Waste Management and the Green Economy."The primary objectives are to explore the concept of the green economy by analyzing the environmental impact of waste disposal, examine the significance of waste trade in generating government revenue, evaluate Haritha Karma Sena's role in providing employment opportunities for disadvantaged communities, and assess the importance of technical support in waste disposal. The activities of Haritha Karma Sena play a vital role in mitigating improper waste treatment, thereby improving environmental quality.

In India, the Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) plays a key role in managing solid waste, especially in Kerala. Operated by local self-government bodies, it includes around 30,000 trained workers mostly women who collect non-biodegradable waste from over 3 million households across more than 1,000 local bodies. With each household generating about 0.3 kg of plastic waste daily, HKS manages approximately 900,000 kg (900 tons) of plastic waste every day, highlighting its large-scale impact on environmental sustainability and employment generation. However, despite their vital role, HKS workers often face serious challenges, including low wages, lack of safety equipment, exposure to health risks, and minimal recognition. Poor working conditions, irregular sanitation, and social stigma further reduce their job satisfaction and overall well-being. This study aims to shed light on these issues and recommend practical steps to improve their working conditions and dignity. The present paper explores the issues faced by HKS workers in Thrissur district.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the challenges faced by workers in haritha karma sena.
2. To study the influence of demographic profile on the problems faced by the workers of Haritha karma sena

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data, where primary data were collected from 120 respondents in Thrissir district using a well-structured questionnaire. Convenience sampling technique is used to select the samples. The secondary data were gathered from thesis papers, books, journals, relevant articles, and websites. The simple statistical tools like percentage weighted mean, ANOVA were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Influence of Age on Problems Experienced by Workers

H01: There is no significant difference in the problems encountered by workers across various age categories.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Occupational stigma	Between Groups	4.422	3	1.474	1.002	0.4
	Within					
	Groups	67.658	46	1.471		
	Total	72.08	49			

Wage inadequacy	Between Groups	0.961	3	0.32	0.289	0.833
	Within Groups					
	Groups	51.059	46	1.11		
	Total	52.02	49			
Wage irregularity	Between Groups	9.442	3	3.147	2.009	0.126
	Within Groups					
	Groups	72.078	46	1.567		
	Total	81.52	49			
Lack of recognition	Between Groups	1.634	3	0.545	0.461	0.711
	Within Groups					
	Groups	54.286	46	1.18		
	Total	55.92	49			
	Between Groups	5.165	3	1.722	2.013	0.125
Inadequate facilities."	Within Groups	39.335	46	0.855		
	Total	44.5	49			

Source: Primay data

The ANOVA results reveal no significant differences across age groups in Haritha Karma Sena workers' experiences of occupational stigma ($p = 0.400$), wage inadequacy ($p = 0.833$), wage irregularity ($p = 0.126$), lack of recognition ($p = 0.711$), and inadequate facilities ($p = 0.125$). Since all p -values exceed 0.05, the findings suggest that these challenges are uniformly faced by workers, regardless of age. This highlights the need for broad-based interventions to address social stigma, wage-related concerns, delayed payments, lack of appreciation, and inadequate facilities, rather than targeting specific age groups.

Table 2: How different age groups perceive the sufficiency of income among the workers.

H02: There is no significant difference in the perception of income sufficiency among workers across different age groups.

ANOVA						
Factors		Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Occupational health issues	Between Groups	1.071	3	0.357	0.417	0.742
	Within Groups	39.409	46	0.857		
	Total	40.48	49			

Workplace safety	Between Groups	1.109	3	0.37	0.35	0.789
	Within Groups	48.511	46	1.055		
	Total	49.62	49			
Awareness sufficiency	Between Groups	1.523	3	0.508	0.343	0.794
	Within Groups	68.097	46	1.48		
	Total	69.62	49			
Workplace satisfaction	Between Groups	2.214	3	0.738	0.74	0.534
	Within Groups	45.866	46	0.997		
	Total	48.08	49			
Workload stress.	Between Groups	2.28	3	0.76	0.828	0.485
	Within Groups	42.22	46	0.918		
	Total	44.5	49			
Work-life balance	Between Groups	1.551	3	0.517	0.379	0.769
	Within Groups	62.769	46	1.365		
	Total	64.32	49			

Source: Primay data

Haritha Karma Sena workers' perceptions of occupational health issues ($p = 0.742$), workplace safety ($p = 0.789$), awareness sufficiency ($p = 0.794$), workplace satisfaction ($p = 0.534$), workload stress ($p = 0.485$), or work-life balance ($p = 0.769$). Since all p -values exceed 0.05 The null hypothesis is not rejected indicating that these challenges are experienced similarly across all age groups. This suggests that concerns related to health, safety, job satisfaction, workload, and work-life balance are not age-dependent and should be addressed through broad, organisation-wide interventions rather than age-specific strategies.

Table 3: Influence of age on Society's View on Work and Experiences with Discrimination

H03: There is no significant difference in how different groups perceive the level of social recognition for their work.

ANOVA						
Factors		Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mismanagement	Between Groups	1.433	3	0.478	0.675	0.572
	Within Groups	32.567	46	0.708		
	Total	34	49			
Social neglect	Between Groups	0.799	3	0.266	0.995	0.404
	Within Groups	12.321	46	0.268		
	Total	13.12	49			
Public approval	Between Groups	0.466	3	0.155	0.471	0.704
	Within Groups	15.154	46	0.329		
	Total	15.62	49			
Health and Safety issues	Between Groups	1.262	3	0.421	1.517	0.223
	Within Groups	12.758	46	0.277		
	Total	14.02	49			
Unstable environment	Between Groups	0.183	3	0.061	0.153	0.927
	Within Groups	18.397	46	0.4		
	Total	18.58	49			

Source: Primay data

The ANOVA test examined whether there were significant differences among groups in their perceptions of mismanagement, social neglect, public disapproval, health and safety issues, and unstable income. With all p-values (Sig.) greater than 0.05 (Mismanagement = 0.572, Social Neglect = 0.404, Public Disapproval = 0.704, Health & Safety Issues = 0.223, Unstable Income = 0.927), The null hypothesis is not rejected indicating no statistically significant differences in perceptions among the groups. This suggests that concerns related to these factors are experienced similarly across all groups, without any one group perceiving them as significantly more or less severe than others.

Findings

- The analysis indicates that there is no significant difference in the challenges faced by workers across age groups. Issues such as occupational stigma ($p = 0.400$), wage inadequacy ($p = 0.833$), irregular payments ($p = 0.126$), lack of recognition ($p = 0.711$), and inadequate facilities ($p = 0.125$) are experienced equally, regardless of age.
- There is no significant variation in perceptions of occupational health issues ($p = 0.742$), workplace safety ($p = 0.789$), awareness levels ($p = 0.794$), job satisfaction ($p = 0.534$), stress due to workload ($p = 0.485$), or work-life balance ($p = 0.769$) among different age groups. Respondents of all ages reported similar views in these areas.
- There is also no significant difference in perceptions related to mismanagement ($p = 0.572$), social neglect ($p = 0.404$), public disapproval ($p = 0.704$), health and safety concerns ($p = 0.223$), and unstable income ($p = 0.927$). These findings suggest that workers from all age brackets face these issues in a similar way.
- The majority of Haritha Karma Sena workers earn less than 10,000 per month, highlighting their financial struggles despite the physically demanding nature of their work.
- Nearly 68% of the respondents experience job insecurity due to the absence of formal contracts or long-term employment agreements.
- Around 82% of workers face resistance from the public, making waste collection and disposal more challenging.
- Many workers suffer from physical strain and injuries caused by improper waste handling and the lack of safety equipment.

Suggestions

- Conduct public awareness campaigns to promote waste segregation at the source and build respect for the role of HKS workers.
- Ensure fair wages, timely payments, and proper protective equipment to improve job satisfaction and worker safety.

Conclusion

The Haritha Karma Sena initiative has improved sustainable waste management in Kerala by involving local communities, especially women, in waste collection and recycling. It has enhanced

cleanliness, created employment, and increased public awareness about responsible waste disposal. However, challenges such as poor infrastructure, low wages, and social stigma remain. For long-term success, better working conditions, fair wages, modern technology, public education, and supportive policy reforms are essential to strengthen the program's impact.

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