

Awareness, Perception & Involvement of Child Ragpickers in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Dr. Arun Kumar Sharma, Dr. Bimal Anjum, Dr. Anju Bala, Dr. Lalit Singla, Vivek Kumar, Ishita Bhutani

DAV College, Chandigarh. Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2026.150600124>

Received: 28 June 2026; Accepted: 07 July 2026; Published: 15 July 2026

ABSTRACT

Child ragpicking is a type of informal waste collection practiced by children to survive, and this practice exposes them to dangerous situations and leaves them outside of formal sanitation systems. The aim of the study is to critically examine how far child ragpickers understand Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) and how they see themselves in the mission and whether their hygiene habits and lived experience are consistent with the mission goals. It also aims to analyse whether SBA policies acknowledge or favour this vulnerable population and evaluates their hopes of education, security and dignified livelihood beyond ragpicking. A survey of 479 child rag pickers under the age of 14 years was conducted in four districts of Punjab, Bathinda, Mansa, Sangrur and Barnala with the help of a structured interview schedule. The research measures five fundamental dimensions, namely, SBA awareness, involvement in cleanliness activities, hygiene and sanitation behaviour, perception of waste management, and future aspirations. In exploring these dimensions, the research will draw attention to the lack of connection between the objectives of the programme and the actual experiences of children who work at the bottom of the waste economy, and therefore, the necessity to formally incorporate them, provide them with welfare, and protect them with policies in the Indian sanitation system.

Keywords: Child Ragpickers, Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Waste Management, Sanitation Awareness, Child Labour, Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary life has evolved rapidly and as things have evolved so has the quantity of wastes generated by individuals. With the improvement in living conditions and the shift in the consumer habits, there is the production of more solid waste daily. Ragpickers in this case are very significant in waste management and ensuring that the environment remains clean. Ragpickers are unofficial garbage collectors who pick and sort out useful or recyclable materials in garbage in order to make a living. They collect used materials like old papers, plastics, scrap metals, glass bottles, used medical supplies and other waste products. They are normally picked up in dumping grounds, railways, bus stops, streets, markets, riverbanks, and the surrounding residential premises. Once the waste is collected, ragpickers sell the waste to local scrap dealers who in turn sell the waste in large quantities to recycling industries. A lot of ragpickers join this occupation because of poverty, lack of money, or bad family circumstances. This work is participated by both men and women and in most instances even children are involved. Ragpickers work informally. They lack regular working hours, safety equipment, and safe working environment. Despite the fact that cities are still growing and developing, ragpickers still have to deal with numerous problems. The society does not treat them well and does not provide them with any official support or protection.

Child labour remains a severe social problem in India, particularly in children who are engaged in hazardous and informal employment such as ragpicking. Child rag pickers are young people who make a small amount of money by picking and selling recyclable waste materials such as plastics, metals, and paper. These children usually belong to very poor families where even the slightest contribution to the family income is essential to live. The majority of them lack access to proper education, sanitation facilities, health, and any form of social assistance.

They have to deal with any type of waste in their work, which exposes them to the risk of injuries, infections, and other health issues at all times. Although ragpickers contribute to the recycling process and waste disposal, they are seldom appreciated. It is relevant to know their conditions of living, issues, and their awareness regarding cleanliness programmes such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. This assists in developing superior policies that favor them and enhance waste management within the society. In 2014, the Government of India introduced a nationwide campaign to enhance sanitation, hygiene practices, and solid waste management, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan SBA.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan SBA has helped in making the lives of ragpickers better through the promotion of organized and safer ways of handling waste. It has motivated the municipalities to identify and involve ragpickers in organized waste collection programs, which improves their self-respect and chances of living. The sensitization under SBA has enhanced the sensitivity of the people on the waste workers and the elimination of stigma. The improved sanitation infrastructure and clean waste disposal sites have reduced health risks particularly among children. The child ragpickers are given safety kits, education and rehabilitation services by the NGOs and CSR groups who are inspired by the national momentum of SBA. Waste workers have enhanced skills and income security due to training programs that were launched under SBA. Less open dumping and more segregation have resulted in safer working conditions. Although the programme has focused on community involvement and behavioural change, some stakeholder groups, including child ragpickers, are still marginalized by programme visibility and benefits despite their huge input towards cleanliness. The awareness and perception of SBA among child ragpickers is also important to understand because their involvement does not only determine the outcome of the urban sanitation but also the inclusion in the national development process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Relevance to Present Research
Jha & Sinha (2018)	Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) in slum communities & working conditions of child ragpickers	Awareness of SBA remains low in slums; child ragpickers act as early cleaners; work in unsafe conditions with no protective gear; lack of SBA knowledge.	Highlights lack of SBA reach among vulnerable groups and unsafe working conditions faced by children.
Goyal (2019)	Waste management challenges in Punjab and the role of informal workers	90% waste unprocessed; ragpickers reduce municipal waste load significantly; they remain unrecognised in formal systems; suggests integrating them into structured waste models.	Supports need for formal inclusion of ragpickers in waste management and SBA implementation.
Kumar (2019)	Socio-economic factors pushing children into ragpicking	Ragpickers work in hazardous conditions; exploitation by dealers; poor wages; no education access; work remains invisible.	Strengthens argument for rehabilitation, education, and protection for child ragpickers.
Majumder & Rajvanshi (2019)	Living & working conditions of child ragpickers in Allahabad	Children belong to poor migrant families; hazardous working environment; exploitation; frequent injuries; no bargaining power.	Provides socio-economic context for understanding vulnerability and unsafe conditions of child ragpickers.
Singh & Gupta (2020)	SBA awareness in urban slums and recognition of ragpickers	Moderate SBA awareness; behavioural change limited; ragpickers' contributions	Reinforces gap between SBA outreach and actual inclusion

		unrecognised; SBA communication rarely reaches informal workers.	of child ragpickers in awareness campaigns.
Sharma (2021)	Contribution of ragpickers to recycling & their SBA awareness	Ragpickers recycle 20–30% of municipal waste; awareness of SBA very low; work without safety equipment; serious health risks.	Highlights low awareness and high health vulnerability among ragpickers despite major contribution to cleanliness.
ILO–UNICEF (2024)	Global report on child labour trends and risks	138 million children in labour; 54 million in hazardous work; informal waste picking common in South Asia; linked to poverty and weak social protection.	Provides global context of child labour, supporting need for protective policies and rehabilitation.

Research Gaps

Even though the available literature offers some useful information about socio-economic disadvantages and dangerous working environments of child ragpickers, there are still some significant gaps. Their awareness, knowledge, or perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) is hardly studied, although they play a major role in the cleanliness of the city. The existing literature does not provide much quantitative, score-based measures of their knowledge of sanitation, their hygiene behaviour and their involvement in cleanliness activities. There is also a lack of comparative analysis between districts, age groups or educational levels and it is not answered whether demographic factors play any role in awareness or perception. Also, there is little literature on the future ambitions of child ragpickers or the impact of SBA policies on their lives, safety, and prospects. Although researchers observe that informal workers are seldom targeted by SBA outreach, there is no research that specifically assesses the presence or absence of child ragpickers in SBA programs. These gaps reveal the necessity of an empirical, multidimensional evaluation of the awareness, perception, and lived experiences of child ragpickers under SBA.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan among the respondents.
2. To examine the extent of participation of respondents in cleanliness related activities under Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan.
3. To evaluate the sanitation and hygiene awareness of the respondents, including access to basic facilities.
4. To analyse the respondents' perception of cleanliness, waste management, and the role of rag pickers in Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan.
5. To understand the future aspirations of respondents and their recommendations regarding government support and alternative opportunities for rag pickers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research was carried out to get an insight into the awareness, perception and participation of child rag pickers in SBA in 4 districts of Malwa region of Punjab. The study sample consisted of 479 child rag pickers who were below the age of 14 years. These rag pickers were selected at different locations of the towns and four districts of Punjab: Bathinda, Mansa, Sangrur, Barnala. The research is founded on the primary survey by means of interview schedule method where the researcher personally interviewed rag pickers and noted their answers in a structured questionnaire. The researcher has taken care of the fact that the selected rag pickers should have had enough exposure to the rag picking and the issues and problems associated with it.

Table 1: Mean Score of Awareness and Perception of SBA Across Locations

Sr. No.	Particulars	Bathinda	Mansa	Sangrur	Barnala	ANOV A (p-Value)
No. of Respondents (479)		138	104	129	108	
1	Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan	13.15	13.25	13.54	13.42	0.23
2	Participation in Cleanliness Activities	8.45	8.4	8.27	8.48	0.427
3	Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness	9.31	9.18	9.17	9.2	0.846
4	Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management	15.64	15.67	15.68	15.94	0.442
5	Future Aspirations and Recommendations	10.33	10.42	10.32	10.45	0.752

1. Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan: The current research was carried out to get an insight into the awareness, perception and participation of child rag pickers in SBA in 4 districts of Malwa region of Punjab. The study sample consisted of 479 child rag pickers who were below the age of 14 years. These rag pickers were selected at different locations of the towns and four districts of Punjab: Bathinda, Mansa, Sangrur, Barnala. The research is founded on the primary survey by means of interview schedule method where the researcher personally interviewed rag pickers and noted their answers in a structured questionnaire. The researcher has taken care of the fact that the selected rag pickers should have had enough exposure to the rag picking and the issues and problems associated with it.

2. Participation in Cleanliness Activities: The average scores of participation are between 8.27 and 8.48 which is slightly higher than the mid value of the highest score 15. This means that there is moderate participation, which is mostly due to the work environment of children and not voluntary participation. The compelled livelihoods make ragpicker children already engaged in waste collection, that is why the p-value of 0.427 is not significant, and thus the participation of ragpicking is the same regardless of the location. This also substantiates the fact that their involvement is not voluntary but rather a necessity in the Swachh Bharat activities and hence work-based.

3. Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness: Sanitation and hygiene awareness scores are between 9.17 and 9.31, which is near the middle of the maximum score 20. The similarity of scores in all the places and the non-significant p-value of 0.846 suggests that the level of hygiene awareness is uniform, probably due to exposure to waste in the workplace and not due to the systematic health education interventions.

4. Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management : The scores are between 15.64 and 15.94, which are far above the middle of the maximum score 25. These are relatively high values that indicate that ragpicker children have a solid perceptual concept of cleanliness and waste management. The p-value of 0.442 shows that there is no significant difference between districts, which means that this perception is always formed based on lived experience and not on the specifics of the location. Therefore, the experience-based learning results in the high level of practical knowledge even without formal education.

5. Future Aspirations and Recommendations : The range of scores 10.32-10.45 indicates that the aspirations of children are right in the middle of the possible maximum mean 15. This is moderate to high aspirations, indicating that they have expectations of a better opportunity, education, and improved hygiene but within the constraints of poverty and social disadvantage. Thus, their hopes of improvement are there but modest because of limited resources and exposure.

Table 2: Composite Score of Awareness and Perception of SBA Across Locations

Sr. No.	Particulars	Bathinda	Mansa	Sangrur	Barnala	ANOVA (p-Value)
1	Awareness and Perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan Among Child Rag Pickers under the present study	56.88	56.93	56.98	57.49	0.444

The cluster mean of Awareness and Perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan among child ragpickers is nearly the same with the range of 56.88 Bathinda to 57.49 possible mean Barnala possible mean of the total possible score of 100 in the four districts under study. These values are positioned a little higher than the average score which denotes medium awareness and perception i.e. children know about the Swachh Bharat initiative at the level of basic knowledge and do not have the deep knowledge or informed involvement. The p-value value of 0.444 of ANOVA makes it clear that the variance in the means of scores in Bathinda, Mansa, Sangrur, and Barnala are not significantly different. It means that the place does not affect the level of awareness or perception of child ragpickers. Rather, they seem to be guided by collective working conditions that have a socio-economic nature and not based on district or government exposure.

Generally, the interpretation shows that regardless of the residence or work location, child ragpickers show the same awareness and perception of the sanitation practices and their perception towards cleanliness practices and their participation in Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. Because of their daily contact with waste, they know about cleanliness at more practical level, but in the form of awareness, not form of formal learning and in-depth comprehending.

Awareness and Perception of SBA Across Age Group

Mean Score of Sub-Factors as per Age						
Sr. No.	Particulars	Below 8 years	8–10 years	11–12 years	13–14 years	ANOVA (p-Value)
	No. of Respondents (479)	12	44	34	329	
1	Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan	13.5	13.16	13.21	13.4	0.662
2	Participation in Cleanliness Activities	8	8.23	8.44	8.42	0.373
3	Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness	9.5	9	9.18	9.25	0.634
4	Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management	15.83	16.05	15.63	15.7	0.492
5	Future Aspirations and Recommendations	10.5	10.59	10.43	10.33	0.499

1. Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan

The average of the scores of awareness rate is close to 13.16 13.50 out of the possible 25 which is just a bit above the average (12.5). It means that the awareness of child ragpickers is moderate since they are aware of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan but do not have deep and conceptually strong knowledge. Interestingly, the greatest score comes under children under the age of 8 years and this could be attributed to the fact that they are exposed to this at an early age in the waste collection environment and not as a result of education. The p-value 0.662 demonstrates that the variation in the awareness between the different age groups is not statistically significant,

that is, age does not affect the level of awareness. On the whole, the mean that is observed denotes a simple and rudimentary level of awareness about SBA across the age groups.

2. Participation in Cleanliness Activities

The average of the scores of awareness rate is close to 13.16 13.50 out of the possible 25 which is just a bit above the average (12.5). It means that the awareness of child ragpickers is moderate since they are aware of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan but do not have deep and conceptually strong knowledge. Interestingly, the greatest score comes under children under the age of 8 years and this could be attributed to the fact that they are exposed to this at an early age in the waste collection environment and not as a result of education. The p-value 0.662 demonstrates that the variation in the awareness between the different age groups is not statistically significant, that is, age does not affect the level of awareness. On the whole, the mean that is observed denotes a simple and rudimentary level of awareness about SBA across the age groups.

3. Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness

The mean scores of sanitation and hygiene awareness are between 9.00 and 9.50 out of 20 which is slightly below the middle point (10). This shows that hygienic awareness is low/moderate in that the children have only basic knowledge of washing hands or keeping off visible dirt, and are not well informed of the preventive hygiene and disease-involved sanitation measures. The p-value of 0.634 proves that the minimal differences in age are not significant and age does not influence hygiene awareness. The lack of awareness is probably due to the experience rather than the training in hygiene. This way, the knowledge of children of hygiene is incomplete and not developed, despite their age.

4. Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management

The mean scores of sanitation and hygiene awareness are between 9.00 and 9.50 out of 20 which is slightly below the middle mark (10). This shows that hygienic awareness is low/moderate in that the children have only basic knowledge of washing hands or keeping off visible dirt, and are not well informed of the preventive hygiene and disease-involved sanitation measures. The p-value of 0.634 proves that the minimal differences in age are not significant and age does not influence hygiene awareness. The lack of awareness is probably due to the experience rather than the training in hygiene. This way, the knowledge of children of hygiene is incomplete and not developed, despite their age.

5. Future Aspirations and Recommendations

The mean score of aspirations in the future lies between 10.33 and 10.59 out of 20 which leaves the aspirations of children almost in the center. This suggests average dreams, meaning that child ragpickers still want to have improved life, education, and hygiene, but they also do not have high expectations because of the lack of life opportunities and financial factors. The differences between the scores of the ages with p-value 0.499 are not statistically significant, which indicates that there is no difference in the age of children in terms of their hopes and aspirations. They have their dreams but cannot fulfill them due to socioeconomic reasons instead of age gaps.

Mean Score of Factors as per Age						
Sr. No.	Particulars	Below 8 years	8–10 years	11–12 years	13–14 years	ANOVA (p-Value)
1	Awareness and Perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan Among Child Rag Pickers under the present study	57.33	57.02	56.88	57.1	0.932

The average score of Awareness and Perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) were tested on the four age groups of child ragpicking, including below 8 years, 8 -10 years, 11-12 years and 13-14 years. The mean scores fell within a very close range of 56.88 to 57.33 with a possible maximum of 100. This minor variance shows that there is nearly the same awareness and perception of SBA by all age categories. The largest mean was indicated in children of less than 8 years (57.33), although children between 11 and 12 years (56.88) had the lowest mean but the difference is not of great significance. The ANOVA test outcome ($p = 0.932$) proves that these differences are not statistically significant, meaning that age has no effect on the perception or comprehension of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan by the child ragpickers. Although the maturity and exposure is different, the fact that the two have the same scores suggests that the kind of working atmosphere the children are exposed to presents them with the problems of waste, cleanliness and sanitation regardless of their age.

Because the overall factor score is based on several components, that is, the awareness, participation, hygiene knowledge, the perception of cleanliness and waste management, and future aspirations, it can be concluded that younger and older ragpickers are no different in their familiarity with SBA, no different in their safety and hygiene behaviour, equal in terms of their involvement in cleanliness activities that are required by their work, no different in their perception regarding waste management, and no different in their future aspirations in relation to education and better livelihood. In this manner, the statistical insignificance indicates that it is the socio-economic conditions and routine working, as opposed to age that influence the children to be aware and conscious of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan and thus the scores were the same at all levels.

Awareness and Perception of SBA Across Educational Status

Mean Score of Sub-Factors as per Educational Status					
Sr. No.	Particulars	Never attended school	Currently studying	Dropped out	ANOVA (p-Value)
	No. of Respondents (479)	100	147	232	
1.A	Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan	13.18	13.33	13.42	0.474
1.B	Participation in Cleanliness Activities	8.35	8.38	8.43	0.814
1.C	Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness	9.26	9.37	9.11	0.204
1.D	Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management	15.62	15.72	15.77	0.727
1.E	Future Aspirations and Recommendations	10.38	10.32	10.41	0.764

1. Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan

The average scores on the awareness about Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) show that the average values are 13.18, 13.33, and 13.42 to children who had never attended school, children studying, and children who dropped out of school respectively. These are a bit higher than the mid-range of 12.5 of 25 which implies that there is moderate awareness between all the categories. Interestingly, the difference in levels of education is quite insignificant and the p-value of 0.474 proves that education does not seem to be the defining factor in terms of awareness development. The results observed point to the fact that children in ragpicking occupations develop the awareness not in schools, but by practical exposure to the waste, interpersonal experiences with municipal workers, and through the campaigns that they perceive in the environment. The messages of Swachh Bharat are visible on the streets, garbage bins, and posters; hence available even to non-school children. Therefore, the mission awareness appears to be a more of an experience and environmental result than an academic one.

2. Participation in Cleanliness Activities

The scores obtained on the participation in cleanliness activities indicate a score between 8.35 and 8.43 which is slightly higher than the mid point score of 7.5 among 15 individuals. This represents moderate participation in cleanliness activities by all the child respondents regardless of their level of education. The p-value (0.814) represents once again the lack of statistically significant difference between children who have never attended school, their present enrolment, and those who have dropped out. Given the fact that ragpicking as a profession implies them working daily in the collection, sorting, and processing of waste, these children are automatically involved in activities that can bring about cleanliness. Hence, they have not been involved due to any formal education, session of morality, or training of civic life, but direct result of their work, which indirectly transforms them into contributors of communal cleanliness. Because of their location in the informal waste management systems, regardless of their education or not, they remain central to the problem, which is the paradox of them being seen as both marginalized employees and unacknowledged participants in cleanliness.

3. Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness

Sanitation and hygiene awareness scores have a range of 9.11 and 9.37 indicating low-moderate levels of awareness on child ragpickers. The p-value of 0.204 indicates that these differences are statistically not significant, i.e., educational status is not a very important factor in determining the knowledge of hygiene. This is a key revelation: though the schools might be educating the children about the importance of keeping clean, the same is not entirely applicable to children whose family background is in the impoverished category. Their education is largely based on their experience in unclean conditions, inability to access cleanliness facilities and the absence of adult influence, and restrict their competence of exercising or internalizing rules of proper hygiene. Therefore, even school-going children are not found to be much more aware, indicating that the socio-economic disadvantage of the system prevails in the system. This requires special intervention programs to be followed with vulnerable child workers and not just classroom awareness programs.

4. Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management

Sanitation and hygiene awareness scores have a range of 9.11 and 9.37 indicating low-moderate levels of awareness on child ragpickers. The p-value of 0.204 indicates that these differences are statistically not significant, i.e., educational status is not a very important factor in determining the knowledge of hygiene. This is a key revelation: though the schools might be educating the children about the importance of keeping clean, the same is not entirely applicable to children whose family background is in the impoverished category. Their education is largely based on their experience in unclean conditions, inability to access cleanliness facilities and the absence of adult influence, and restrict their competence of exercising or internalizing rules of proper hygiene. Therefore, even school-going children are not found to be much more aware, indicating that the socio-economic disadvantage of the system prevails in the system. This requires special intervention programs to be followed with vulnerable child workers and not just classroom awareness programs.

5. Future Aspirations and Recommendations

The means of aspirations and recommendations are 10.32-10.41, which are very close to the mean score of 10 out of 20, reflect modest rates of hopes of a better future. The p-value of 0.764 indicates that there is no significant difference in the educational categories implying that the child either studies, survives or never attends school does not make a significant difference in terms of their hopes and expectations. These children have a common socio-economic hardship, poor opportunities, and face occupational risks, which define the same expectations of life irrespective of the level of education. Poverty, exploitation, parental neglect, and systemic neglect might tone down or decrease their aspirations but they still show a willingness to have better living conditions, be economically stable, and have decent jobs. Education is not going to elevate or even curtail their ambitions, quite on the contrary, the historical facts of ragpicking life impose a limit on aspirations.

Mean Score of Factors as per Educational Status

Sr. No.	Particulars	Never attended school	Currently studying	Dropped out	ANOVA (p-Value)
1	Awareness and Perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan Among Child Rag Pickers under the present study	56.79	57.12	57.13	0.641

The average scores of Awareness and Perception of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) in child ragpickers in various categories of educational institutions are very near with 56.79 in children who never attended schools, 57.12 in those studying, and 57.13 in dropped out. These differences of the margin asserts that educational status is not a source of any significant differentiation of the level of awareness or perception of the cleanliness initiatives. The homogeneity of the scores is confirmed statistically by the ANOVA p-value of 0.641 that is much higher than the standard level of significance (0.05). This clearly holds that the differences that exist between the three educational groups are not statistically significant and this means that schooling is not a causative factor in influencing the awareness or perception of SBA in these children. The comparatively stable and average nature of awareness in all three groups can be explained by a number of similar factors influencing child rag pickers and they include:

- Sharing of living and working environment all children being exposed directly to garbage, dirty environment, and sanitation problems, schooling or not.
- Simple everyday contact with waste collection processes, which necessarily renders them more attentive and knowledgeable regarding the cleanliness process and civic hygiene, without being taught.
- Shared exposure to government campaigns, posters, slogans and messages of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan which can be seen on the community space and accessed in public places as opposed to being just inside the learning institutions.

Such observations bring to the fore that ragpicker children learn about cleanliness efforts by experience and not through education. Their informal training offsets formal training leading to an equal appreciation of hygiene, sanitation in the populace and waste management in all levels of education.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The evaluation of the five objective of the study Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Participation in Cleanliness Activities, Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness, Perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management and Future Aspirations shows a similar trend on the level of awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan on the different districts, age groups and categories of education Children have moderately high awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. Their cognition seems to be based on their experiences in the environment and the work environment than on the school or age. The negligible difference in terms of education proves that there are no differences in the level of awareness among the different groups. The activities of children in clearing activities are moderate and to a great extent work oriented because even rag picking per se implies daily process of handling and separating garbage. The similarity in the level of participation was very high amongst districts, ages and education category, which implies that their occupation influences them to participate but not demographics.

Sanitation and Hygiene Awareness the level of knowledge is low to moderate, and children know about basic hygiene practices, but there is no more knowledge. Since there were no significant group differences, it can be proposed that the exposure to unhygienic environments on a daily basis does not affect all children in a similar way, no matter what their age or education level is.

The scores of perception of Cleanliness and Waste Management were rather high, as well. It means that the practical ideas of cleanliness and waste management are well developed among children, as they have been acquired through practical experience in sorting and working with waste. The p-value of 0.678, 0.134, 0.712 is consistently high, which indicates that the given perception is quite similar irrespective of the demographic category, which confirms the significant role of experiential learning.

Future aspiration scores were between 10.30-10.64 out of 20 which is precisely in the middle. This indicates that children hope to get a better opportunity, better hygiene conditions, and environmental safety, but the aspirations they have are not very high because of the socioeconomic restrictions. The p-value 0.934, 0.812, 0.403 are extremely high which means that there are no differences in expectations of a better future among children of different age, districts, and educational backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

In the study, the ragpicker children demonstrate certain patterns among all demographic categories, districts, age groups, and educational levels which means that their experiences and cognition are formed by the environment they work in rather than by school lessons and their life. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan awareness and involvement is moderate implying that though children are aware of the mission, they are mostly involved in the work of rag picking and not because of the choice. The awareness of sanitation and hygiene is low to moderate, and this level demonstrates the lack of organized education about hygiene. On the contrary, their understanding of hygiene and waste disposal is also quite high and is based on the practical experience of managing garbage in their daily activity. The future prospects are still low and determined by economic challenges and lack of opportunities that would allow them to be more empowered, enhance their health, and broaden their prospects towards a better future.

REFERENCES

1. Goyal, N. (2019). Waste management challenges in Punjab: Evaluating Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the role of informal waste workers. *Journal of Environmental Management Studies*, 12(3), 44–56.
2. Jha, S., & Sinha, M. (2018). Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in slum communities and working conditions of child ragpickers. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 6(2), 78–90.
3. International Labour Organization & UNICEF. (2024). *Child labour global report 2024: Trends, risks, and policy responses*. ILO–UNICEF Joint Global Publication.
4. Kumar, R. (2019). Socio-economic factors influencing child ragpicking: Poverty, migration, and educational deprivation. *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare*, 15(1), 23–35.
5. Majumder, S., & Rajvanshi, A. (2019). Living and working conditions of child ragpickers in Allahabad: A socio-economic analysis. *Children and Society Review*, 27(4), 102–115.
6. Sharma, V. (2021). Contribution of ragpickers to municipal waste recycling and awareness levels of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. *Journal of Urban Waste Management*, 9(1), 55–67.
7. Singh, P., & Gupta, R. (2020). Awareness of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in urban slums and recognition of ragpickers' contribution to sanitation. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research*, 11(3), 88–99.
8. Author & Project Co-Coordinator, ICSSR Sanctioned and funded Project, DAV College, Chandigarh
9. Corresponding Author & Project Coordinator, ICSSR Sanctioned and funded Project, DAV College, Chandigarh
10. Co- author & Project Co-Coordinator, ICSSR Sanctioned and funded Project, Chandigarh University
11. Co- author & Project Co-Coordinator, ICSSR Sanctioned and funded Project, Chandigarh University
12. Co- author & Research Assistant, ICSSR Sanctioned and funded Project
13. Co- author & Field Investigator, ICSSR Sanctioned and funded Project