

“A STUDY OF PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN ALTERNATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF SANITATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SDGS.

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ABSTRACT:

Sanitation workers play a crucial role in maintaining the civic sanitation systems while striving to make ends meet for themselves. While their jobs are plightful and working conditions are deplorable the sanitation workers essentially lack choice when it comes to earning a livelihood. On the contrary the 17 SDGs aim to reduce poverty, hunger while providing decent working conditions. This research paper attempts to understand the problems and challenges associated with alternate employment opportunities for this unorganized sector labour. With a view to understand the perceptions and challenges associated with alternative employment opportunities the researchers have attempted to collect primary data from 30 respondents employed as sanitation workers employed with the Pune Municipal Corporation PMC

Keywords: Sanitation workers, manual scavenging, alternate employment, sustainable development goals.

INTRODUCTION:

Sanitation workers have their job roles lined up with plightful and inhuman working conditions clubbed with toiling in severe weather conditions. The sanitation workers are often seen cleaning manholes, and chocked drainages or cleaning public toilets. In addition to enduring social stigma and isolation, these workers face severe health risks. Tragically, while there is legislation in place to govern the working conditions for the sanitation workers; they yet are deplorable and the occupation is a no choice source of livelihood. On the contrary the SDGs promote, elimination of poverty and hunger in collaboration with decent working conditions. While the health and sanitation activities are crucial from public health's perspective and the importance of the nature of the work done by the sanitation workers cannot be undermined; yet this occupation fails to offer sustenance and reasonable standard of life to the employed therein.

Thus on the whole it is imperative to underline the significance of alternate employment opportunities for people employed in such occupations with the proviso of helping them achieve sustainable employment choices thereby helping to cater with the SDGs of poverty and hunger elimination and decent conditions of work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A summarized study of available literature helped the researcher to identify the problems faced by the sanitation workers in terms of the nature of their job and the resultant occupational stress that affects their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

This paper examines the challenges and issues faced by sanitation workers along Maranthkothala Road in Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu. The research employed a qualitative methodology, conducting interviews with 25 sanitation workers both at their workplaces and homes. A Focus Group Discussion was also held to delve into the socio-cultural, psychological, and behavioral obstacles these workers encounter, with particular attention to gender perspectives. An exploratory research design was used to understand the lived experiences of sanitation workers in the region (Sheethal, 2020) (Dubey, 2020) highlights key trends in the employment conditions of sanitation workers, pointing to the pervasive

role of caste in hindering their progress. The additional strain placed on sanitation workers during the COVID-19 pandemic exposes deeper systemic issues.

(Harsh, 2019) examines the budget for the Self-employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), uncovering significant discrepancies between budgeted, revised, and actual expenditures. Since 2013-14, funding for SRMS has been decreasing. By December 2017, 323 sewer cleaning-related deaths were reported, but only 63% of the cases received full compensation of INR 1 million.

A participatory study conducted by PRIA in 2018 in three Indian cities found that women sanitation workers often face discrimination in accessing legal remedies for their rights as workers and citizens. They struggle with fair wages, inclusion in decision-making processes, and access to benefits. Existing unions, primarily for permanent workers, frequently exclude women and contractual workers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To know about the perception of the sanitation workers with regards to alternate employment.
2. To know about the problems associated with the alternate employment generation for the unorganized labour.
3. To give suggestions to various bodies with respect to alternate employment generation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Out of 16 ward offices in the Pune Municipal Corporation PMC limits. The researcher has opted for Dhole Patil Road ward office. The area sampling method has been applied here. The Dhole Patil Road ward office comprises of 9 kothis each having a staff of three sanitation works called 'Mehter' or drainage bigaris. The researcher has collected primary data using a questionnaire from 27 sanitation workers (Mehters and drainage bigaris from all the kothis under the Dhole Patil Road ward office. The opinions and responses received from the respondents have been instrumental in drafting the findings of this paper. The secondary literature sources in the form of journal articles, research papers etc. have been studied with a view to build premises and to understand and analyze the nature of the problem.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Table 1: Are you aware about alternate employment opportunities?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Yes	19	70%
No	4	15%
Not sure	4	15%

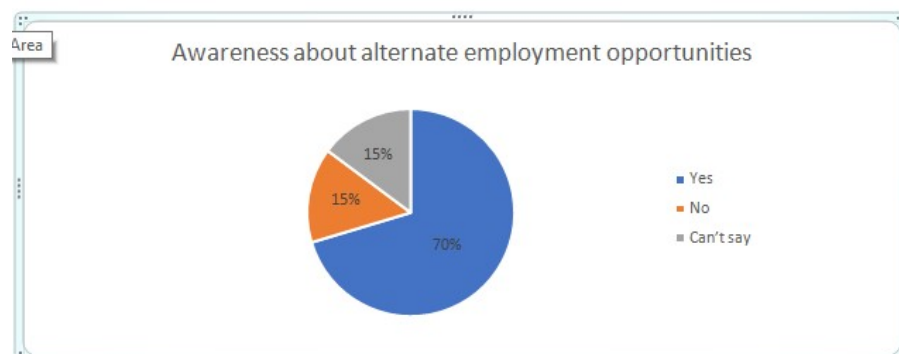


Table 2: Would you prefer alternate jobs with same or better income?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Yes	20	17%
No	7	83%

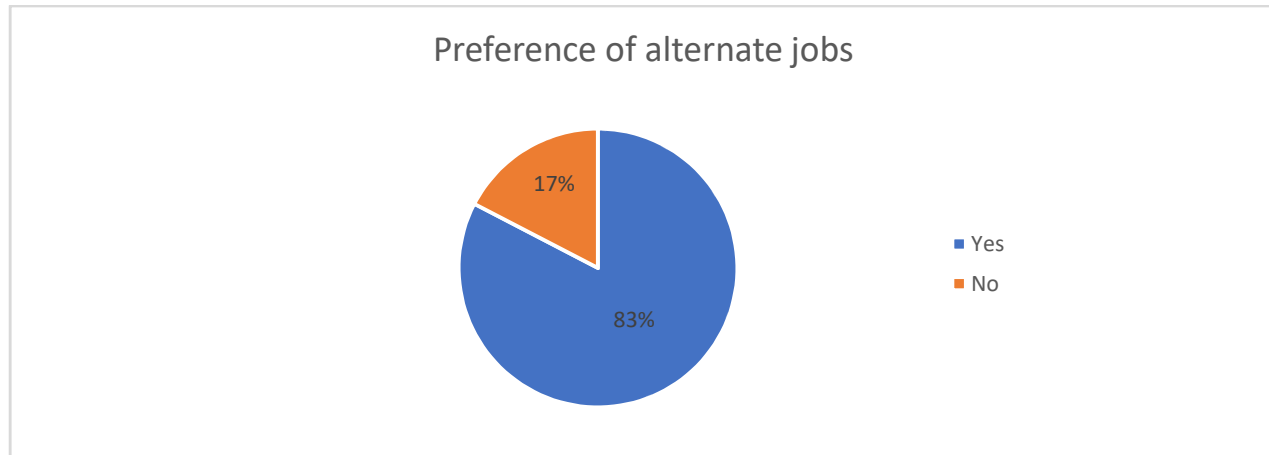


Table 3: What according to you is the main challenge in finding alternate employment? (Respondents have chosen multiple options)

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Lack of skills	18	26%
Lack of education	15	22%
Lack of information about job openings	21	31%
Social discrimination	14	21%

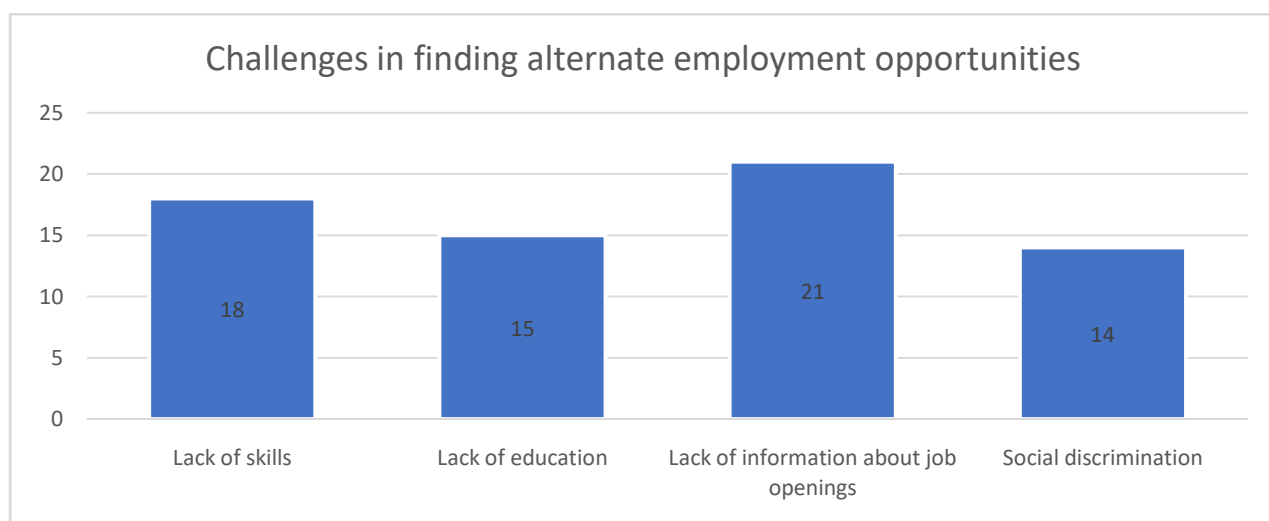


Table 4: Do you have confidence in your skill set?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	0	0
Agree	5	19%
Neutral	3	11%
Disagree	12	44%
Strongly disagree	7	26%

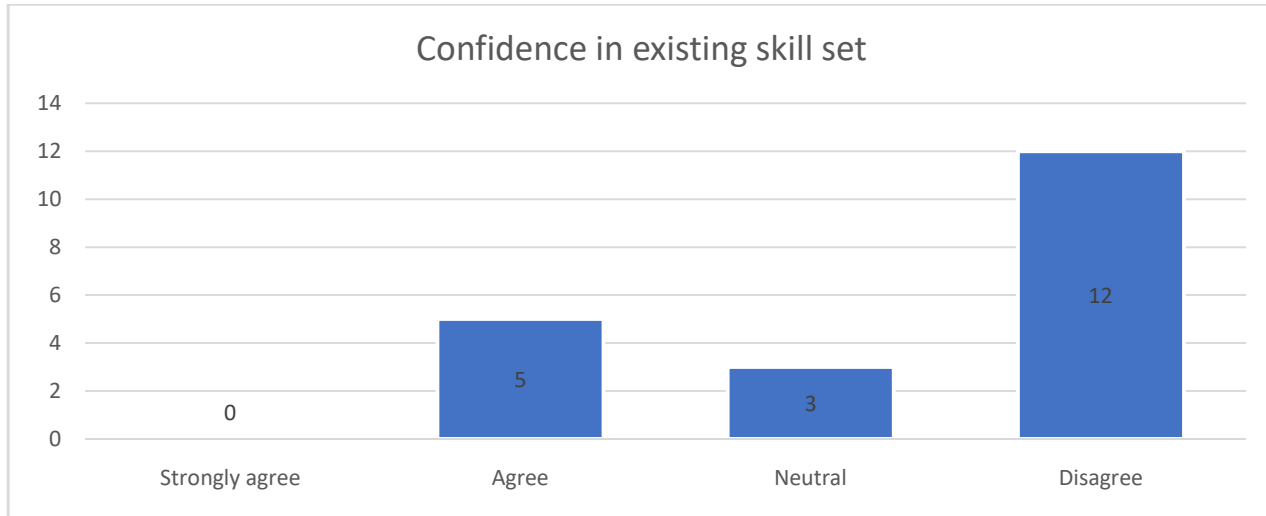


Table 5: Would you need training or support for transition to different job?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Yes	23	85%
No	4	15%



Table 6: Do you feel that your social background could be a hinderance in an employment other than sanitation?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Yes	20	74%
No	4	15%
Can't say	3	11%

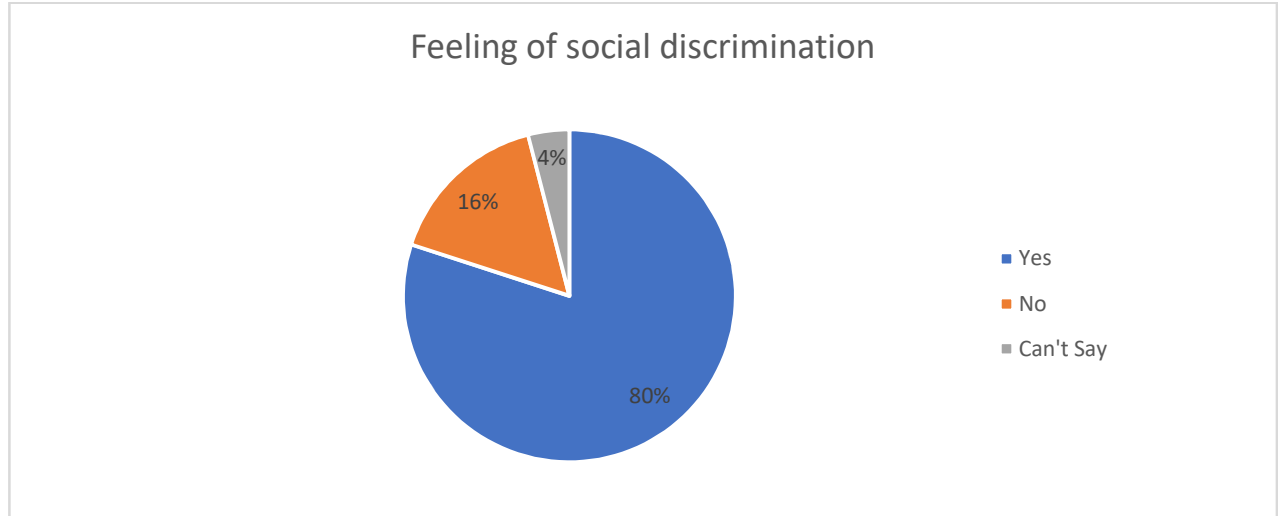


Table 7: Do you feel confidence in finding a job outside sanitation work?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Very confident	2	7%
Somewhat confident	6	22%
Not confident at all	19	70%

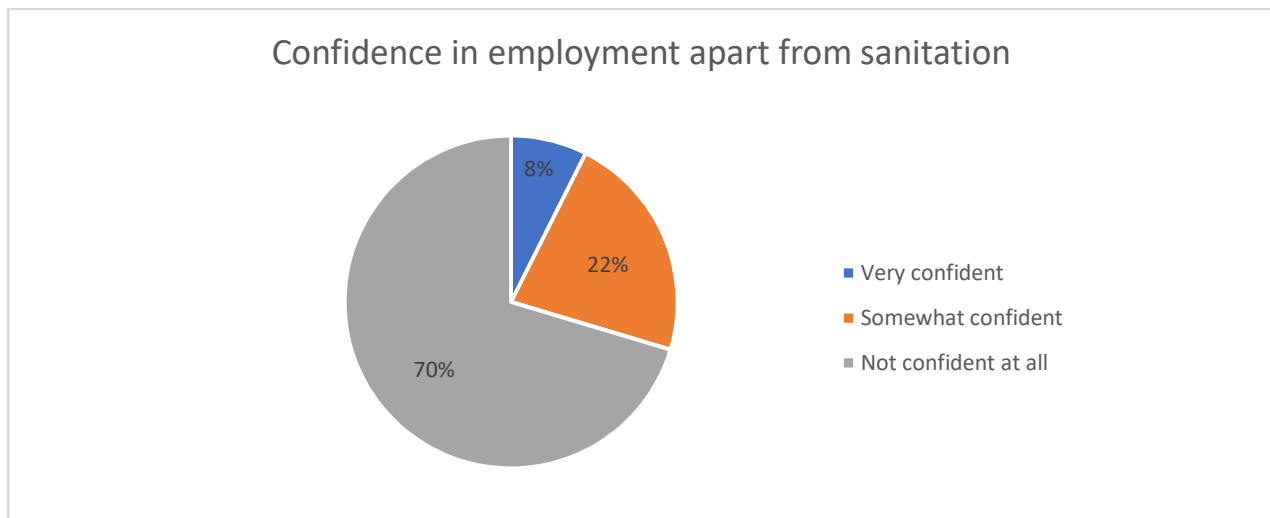


Table 8: How would you rate the job security of alternate employment?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
1	2	7%

2	5	19%
3	3	11%
4	12	44%
5	5	19%

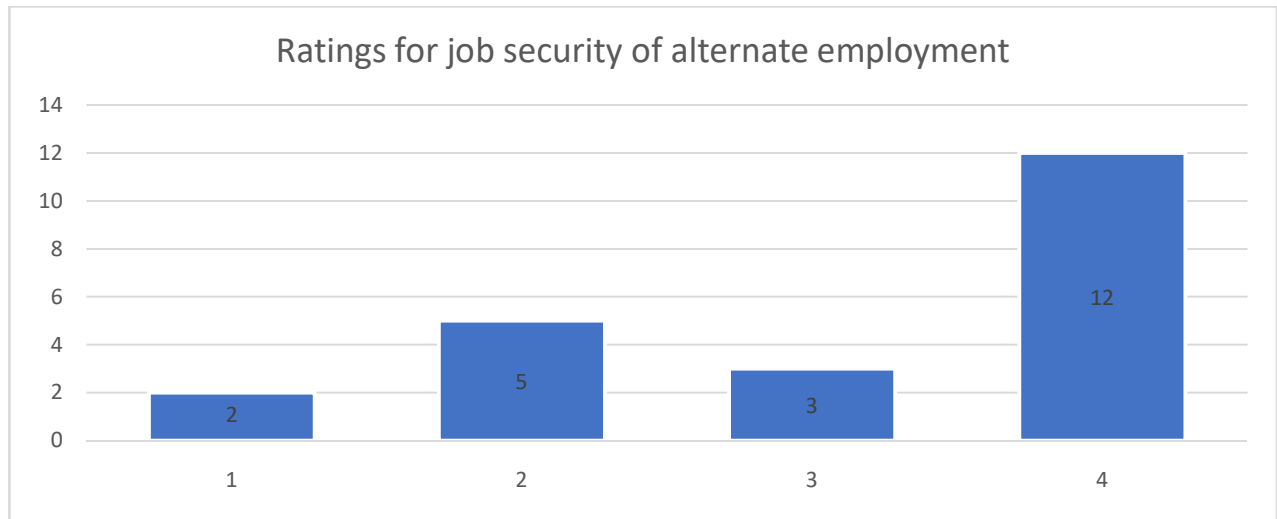
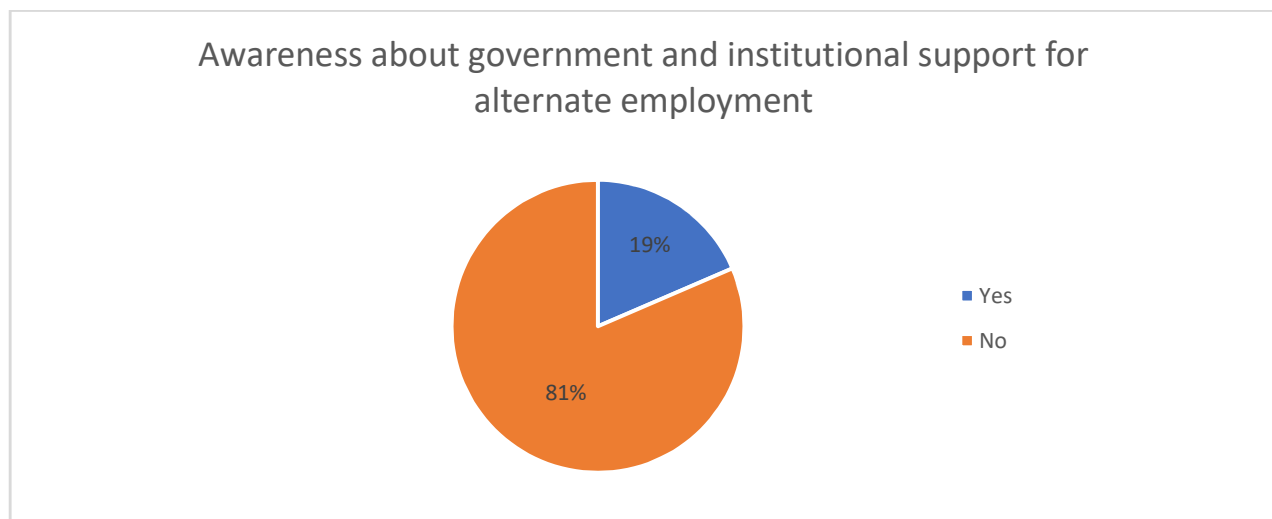


Table 9: Are you aware about support from government or organizations for alternate employment opportunities?

Option	Response Count	Percentage
Yes, I am aware	5	19%
No, I am not aware	22	81%



MAJOR CONCLUSIONS:

- Majority of the respondents (70%) are aware of alternative employment opportunities, indicating that many sanitation workers have knowledge of options beyond their current work. However, 15%

of respondents are not aware of such opportunities, suggesting a lack of access to information or resources. Additionally, another 15% are unsure, reflecting uncertainty or ambiguity about their employment prospects. These findings highlight the need for more robust information dissemination and support systems to help sanitation workers explore alternative livelihoods more confidently and effectively.

- Majority of respondents (83%) would not prefer alternate jobs, even if these offered the same or better income. This suggests that many sanitation workers may feel a strong attachment to their current roles, possibly due to job security, familiarity, or other non-monetary factors such as community ties or a lack of confidence in transitioning to different employment. Only 17% of respondents expressed interest in switching to alternate jobs with similar or improved income, indicating that while some workers are open to change, most remain resistant to exploring other employment opportunities. This highlights the need to explore the underlying reasons behind their reluctance and address potential barriers to career mobility.
- The most commonly cited challenge is a lack of information about job openings, with 21 respondents identifying this as a key issue. This suggests that many workers may not be aware of available opportunities due to inadequate job market visibility or access to relevant networks.
- Lack of skills and lack of education were also prominent challenges, cited by 18 and 15 respondents, respectively. This points to a gap in the skills and qualifications necessary to transition to other types of employment, indicating a need for targeted skill development and educational support programs. Additionally, 14 respondents reported social discrimination as a barrier, reflecting the broader societal and structural inequalities that hinder their ability to access better jobs. This underscores the importance of addressing not only economic but also social obstacles in any efforts to improve employment opportunities for sanitation workers.
- 70% of respondents disagree with the statement, with 44% disagreeing and 26% strongly disagreeing, indicating strong opposition. Only 19% agree, and none strongly agree, while 11% remain neutral. These results reflect widespread disagreement and suggest dissatisfaction or reservations, with a small portion of respondents being uncertain. Further investigation is needed to understand the reasons for this opposition.
- Majority of respondents (85%) would need training or support to transition to a different job, indicating a strong demand for skill development or assistance. Only 15% believe they do not need such support. This suggests that most sanitation workers recognize the need for additional training to successfully shift to alternate employment.
- 74% of respondents feel their social background could be a hindrance in securing employment outside sanitation work, suggesting a strong perception of social barriers. Meanwhile, 15% do not feel this is an issue, and 11% are uncertain. This highlights the significant role that social background plays in shaping workers' employment prospects beyond the sanitation sector.
- 70% of respondents are not confident at all in their ability to transition to other employment, while 22% are somewhat confident, and only 7% are very confident. This indicates that the majority of workers feel uncertain or doubtful about their ability to pursue jobs outside the sanitation sector, highlighting the need for confidence-building measures and support.
- Most respondents (44%) rate the job security of alternate employment at a moderate level (4), while 19% rate it higher (5). However, 19% give a lower rating (2), and 11% provide a mid-range rating (3), with only 7% giving the lowest rating (1). This suggests that while many workers perceive alternate employment as somewhat secure, there are mixed views, with some expressing concerns about job stability.

- Majority (81%) of respondents are not aware of any government or organizational support for alternate employment opportunities. Only 19% are aware of such support, indicating a major gap in awareness that could hinder workers from exploring other employment options.

Suggestions: In accordance with above conclusions the following suggestions have been proposed by the researcher keeping in mind the sustainable development goals:

SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH:

- **Enhance access to alternative employment opportunities:** Establish programs to disseminate job information and opportunities to sanitation workers. Public awareness campaigns and digital platforms could help fill the knowledge gap.
- **Skill development and training programs:** Implement targeted skill-building initiatives that equip workers with qualifications to transition to alternative jobs,
- **SDG 4: Quality Education**
- **Education and skill development:** Offer educational resources and training programs to address the skills gap (SDG 4.4). This includes programs on digital literacy and technical skills, especially in fields like healthcare, technology, or construction.
- **SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**
- **Strengthen institutional support:** Governments and organizations should create more accessible support systems for workers considering alternate employment, addressing both economic and social challenges (SDG 16.6).
- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being**
- **Mental health support:** Provide psychological counseling and confidence-building sessions to help workers overcome doubts about transitioning to alternate jobs, addressing their feelings of insecurity (SDG 3.4).

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