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A study on challenges faced by security guards working for different establishments in teynampet Chennai

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Abstract

Security guards are an integral part of the service industry and play a vital role in safeguarding the interests of their employers and the general public. It is an occupation predominantly having many senior citizens aged 60 and above as employees. The work of security guards is often overlooked and the challenges they face are not always adequately documented. This study is intended to understand the challenges related to their wages, working hours, health aspect, job requirements etc. The chosen methodology for the current study was semi-structured interviews with security guards working in different establishments in the area of Teynampet, Chennai. The research was able to uncover the main challenges faced by security guards, especially with regard to financial inadequacy, poor working conditions, disregard for job description and the role of security agencies in the occupation. The study also revealed the several socioeconomic factors behind opting for the job of a security guard. The study has identified the need for stronger legal and social protections for security guards to ensure that their rights and interests are safeguarded from exploitation by the agencies. The findings have suggested that employers and policymakers take steps to address the challenges faced by security guards, including improving their working conditions and providing better training and support.

Keywords: Security guards, occupational challenges, elderly employment, service industry, security agencies

Introduction

Security guards working for different establishments across Teynampet in Chennai might have many challenges that have not been scientifically studied earlier. Hence, this investigation was taken up including security guards who are registered with a security agency and are not independently employed. It is important to bring this topic into the research forum as the service lent by security personnel is indispensable to us and thereby redirect proper support measures. The research conducted has primarily focused on security guards working in different establishments and their challenges in relation to their occupation, age, social position, etc.

For the purpose of gathering knowledge on previously done research in the area of security services, the research scholar sourced literature for review on research done in “third world countries” or underdeveloped countries such as Papua New Guinea, and countries in West and North Africa since India is a developing country and it would not be appropriate to compare the conditions of security guards in developed countries like North America because the context is vastly different.

According to a recent study conducted on security guards (Jovanović, J., Šarac, I., 2020) ^[9], a connection was found between high occupational stress and health impairments such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases which has severe implications for the elderly population engaged in security services. Agarwal, C. (2014) ^[1] in his book has written about how The Private Security Agencies (Regulation) Act, 2005 in India is instrumental in paving the way for the economic exploitation of security guards working under agencies since contractual agreements are frequently flouted and enable security agencies to employ security guards with an allowance of very minimum wage.

With the advent of privatisation, a large number of agencies have cropped up to facilitate the proper organisation of security guards thereby changing how the entire sector operates.

An East African study (Roger, R., Léonce Koffi, E.-E. C., & Agobe, A. J., 2022) ^[16] established how security companies in the city of Abidjan have increasingly been gathering political capital and how their development could be viewed as “anarchic” in a sense. A recent cross-sectional study (Veljković, D. R., Rancic., 2021) ^[22] revealed three main aspects of occupational burnout that included emotional exhaustion, experiencing depersonalisation and a sense of personal accomplishment and also highlighted how increased working hours and working in shifts contribute to a higher rate of burnout among security officers.

Research conducted in the area of security services has been extremely limited and predominantly has dealt with only the male population, citing the reason that women seldom choose to be in this field. There has also been lack of information on the financial well-being and social status of those working in the security sector. The socioeconomic reasons for opting for this profession have not been previously explored and there has been no specific attention directed to understanding why the security service sector is predominantly taken up by senior citizens. Thus, the current research undertaken intends to bridge this gap of knowledge and attempts to address these issues with the following objectives.

Objectives

- The specific objectives of the present study were to identify and understand the socioeconomic factors leading to employment as security guards
- understand the role of security agencies in recruiting and allocating duties to security guards
- find out the perspective of security guards on the social response and behaviour of the general public towards them

Methodology

The research used the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to collect data. For this purpose, an interview schedule was created comprising open-ended questions related to their basic demographic details, information about their employment history and personal experiences within their occupation as a security guard. To keep the procedure official, the research scholar contacted a number of security agencies through their phone numbers but the agencies refused to offer a conducive space for the interview and instructed the researcher to carry out the study in the workplace of the security guards directly. Therefore, security guards in the area were individually approached. As a result, all the respondents of the study randomly belonged to 18 different agencies.

Sampling Technique

The population identified for this study included security guards who were currently employed in security agencies and were working for different establishments such as residential areas, office buildings, educational institutions etc excluding hospitals and restaurants

On reviewing a list of areas in Chennai that are known for their residential areas as well as commercial establishments, the central area of Teynampet (Zone IX, Ward No. 113) was chosen purposefully, in order to get relevant data for different establishments. A list of prominent streets in the neighbourhood of Vannia Teynampet was created by the researcher manually and a list of establishments was made. The researcher selected 15 residential apartments, 10 offices,

4 banks/ATMs, 2 schools, 3 colleges and 2 auditoriums on the basis of random probability.

The respondents for the study were selected using stratified random sampling in which the target group was divided into various subgroups based on the establishments they worked for i.e., banks and ATMs, office buildings, housing and educational institutions. Out of these subgroups, the samples were selected on the basis of a few important inclusion and exclusion criteria. Male security guards who were registered with an agency and currently working in establishments such as Banks, ATMs, Schools, Colleges, Offices, and Auditoriums were included in the study. It was rare to find female security guards and they were therefore excluded from the study. Busy establishments such as restaurants and hospitals refused to give permission to conduct the study and were excluded from the study.

Participants

A total of 75 individuals were approached out of which several refused to participate indicating different reasons, citing lack of adequate years of experience in the security service and reluctance to participate for fear of misuse of information and losing their job. Therefore, the final sample size was taken to be 35.

Table 1: Distribution Of Respondents According to Their Workplace

| Place of Work | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Apartments | 12 | 34.2% |
| Offices | 7 | 20% |
| Banks/ATMs | 6 | 17.1% |
| Colleges | 5 | 14.2% |
| Auditoriums | 3 | 8.5% |
| Schools | 2 | 5.7% |
| TOTAL | 35 | 100% |

Results and Discussion

The research conducted has primarily focused on security guards working in different establishments and their challenges in relation to their occupation, age, social position, etc. It has managed to review the status of security guards from several sociological standpoints, positioning age as a determining factor among others. The study focused on uncovering the socio-economic factors leading to employment as security guards and attempted to understand the role of security agencies in the contractual labour of security guards. Some of the salient findings of the research are listed below:

The Indian Law recognizes individuals aged 60 and above to be senior citizens. In this study, 34% of the respondents belonged to that category, closely followed by 31% of respondents in the age group of 50-60. There was considerably less number of security guards below the age of 40 years or above 70 years of age both of which fell under 10%.

To gauge the financial necessity of security guards, the respondents were asked about the number of family members at home and whether they were the sole financial provider for the family. With regard to marital status, 86% of security guards interviewed were married while only 15% of them revealed that they were unmarried or widowed. In most cases, there were more than 4 members in the family including the respondent, closely followed by 5 and more members. It was found that having a large family size increased the financial

obligations of individuals, leading them to seek employment to support the family financially. In this study, it was found that respondents residing alone were less engaged in labour in comparison to respondents residing with family members who were engaged in gainful employment well into old age, more specifically in the security sector.

In order to gain a better understanding of their employment history, respondents were asked about their previous occupation. Their narrations revealed that sometimes, their previous occupation led them to take up a job as a security guard to overcome losses incurred in business and repay debts. A vast number of respondents (34.2%) earlier used to take part in loading and unloading shipments, agriculture, construction and other miscellaneous jobs categorised under manual labour. They shared that advancing age meant that they could no longer be engaged in physically strenuous labour and hence, they opted for working as a security guard which they considered to be a relatively less demanding job.

Table 2: Previous Employment Before Entering the Security Industry

| Previous Employment | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Business | 8 | 22.8% |
| Loading job | 5 | 14.2% |
| Manufacturing Company | 4 | 11.4% |
| Agriculture | 3 | 8.5% |
| Auto Driver | 3 | 8.5% |
| Security Industry | 3 | 8.5% |
| Supervisor | 3 | 8.5% |
| Army / Police | 2 | 5.7% |
| Construction | 2 | 5.7% |
| Miscellaneous | 2 | 5.7% |
| TOTAL | 35 | 100% |

Adding onto the reasons for discontinuing their previous job, some participants revealed that they lost their job due to the manufacturing company unexpectedly being shut down. Some had undergone an occupational hazard that had rendered them unable to continue their work. Financial necessity coupled with the lack of qualifications necessary to pursue a job in other fields prompted many of the respondents to seek work in the security sector

Table 3: Amount of Salary Received as a Security Guard Per Month

| Amount of Salary of Security Guards | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Below 10,000 | 4 | 11% |
| 10,000 - 12,000 | 15 | 43% |
| 12,000 - 15,000 | 13 | 37% |
| 15,000 - 20,000 | 1 | 3% |
| Above 20,000 | 2 | 6% |
| TOTAL | 35 | 100% |

The standard number of working hours per shift was recorded as 12 hours for all days of the month, devoid of paid holidays or medical leaves with compulsory alternation between day and night shifts each week. They suffer pay cuts on account of their absence. Some revealed that the agency was strict about leaves, despite pay cuts, often threatening to remove the security guard from duty in the case of more than 5 days of absence in a month. Additionally, the respondents also reported that they did not have a choice in opting for day or night shifts and had to alternate between one week of the day shift and one week of the night shift. One of the primary concerns raised by all of the respondents was that despite

working for all days of the month with no leave, the salary received is very less due to the interference of the security agency.

When asked why they sought employment as a security guard specifically, up to 70% of the respondents mentioned vaguely about either being illiterate or only having completed primary school. As a result, they had predominantly worked in jobs that required manual labour rather than educational qualifications, therefore naturally seeking employment in the security sector after their retirement from manual labour. 15% of the total respondents who had undergone a workplace accident said that they had no other choice but to take up a job like that of a security guard to avoid physical exertion. 65% of the total sample population reported that they lost their previous job after the age of 50. They revealed that if they sought starter-level work in a company, they had to start from a low-level wage which was insufficient.

The study was able to uncover significant data regarding the working conditions of security guards working for different establishments. Some duties that the security guards have been performing included doing door delivery, cleaning the doorway etc., which has not been stated in their job description.

It was found that some of the leading socioeconomic factors behind individuals seeking employment as security guards were the lack of financial stability and retirement from other jobs due to old age. Over 70% of the study population was above the age of 50, who cited that they withdrew from manual labour due to ageing. However, they could not stop working due to financial obligations and therefore, opted for a security job. Moreover, the general working conditions were viewed as comfortable, in stark contrast to their previous job that involved strenuous physical exertion.

On a positive note, it could be considered important that certain participants mentioned that they chose to engage in productive labour not solely due to financial necessity. 15% of the respondents reported that they did not like to sit idle in the household and wanted to support their family in whatever way they could manage. According to the active ageing theory proposed in social gerontology, studies suggest that being involved in productive activities well into old age can help people retain their sense of individuality and maintain a circle of social connections. True to the theory, a considerable number of respondents reported being happy and satisfied to be working every day because they enjoyed the commute and interacting with new people. Around 20% of respondents in the age group of 60 and above shared that one of the positive aspects of their job was meeting with a number of people every day like domestic help workers, tea-givers etc., with whom they are able to strike up a conversation and build a bond. This is significant because, as the study of social gerontology suggests, it is important for elderly persons to have an active social life so that they remain mentally active and feel integrated with society rather than feeling detached. Viewing the obligation to keep working into old age from within the context of the Indian patriarchal society, an ideal of considering men as the primary financial providers of a household has been long upheld. They are seen as heads of the household and there has always been a level of importance and worth associated with working and not staying idle. Some respondents expressed fear that they may lose respect or even their place in the house if they do not earn and contribute to the household. Elderly individuals gained a feeling of autonomy by continuing to earn because of a sense

of gratification and independence in being able to afford one's personal needs without relying on others.

Security guards are increasingly employed solely through agencies and not independently. The security guards have no say over where they are placed and mainly, such an arrangement adversely affects their remuneration. One significant finding of this study was regarding the role of security agencies in the profession of security guards. All of the respondents sampled for the study were employed on a contractual basis which means that the security agency they are registered to will work with different establishments like companies and residential communities to find out their security needs and provide the required employees as part of a contract. When they receive a request for appointing a security guard, they get in touch with the registered candidate and allot work after discussing contract details with the employer regarding salary. With the advent of security agencies acting as intermediaries, contractual terms dictate the way in which security guards operate.

There has been an overall ambiguity when discussing the roles and duties expected of a security guard, particularly in housing associations. This has led to a situation where security guards are overworked and exploited for their labour without adequate pay because they are unaware of their rights. Exclusion of security guards from the process of discussing the terms of the contract has been a form of violation by recruitment agencies.

While discussing the financial aspects of the contractual agreement, the respondents revealed that up to 30-40% of the salary quoted by the employer for their security services is claimed by the agency as a commission. So, where they are supposed to earn 22000 as salary, around 6000 - 8000 rupees is procured by the agency and the security guard ends up earning only 16000. This was not an anomaly but rather followed in most of the agencies, as revealed by the respondents which brings to light the monetary exploitation by the interference of the agency.

The Government of India requires all private security agencies to give employment preference to a person who has served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police or Home Guards. However, only 5.7% of the respondents were ex-servicemen, who were employed in banks as armed security. People who had previously worked in manual labour were predominantly the ones employed in housing complexes. There is still a long way to go before more ex-service personnel in India enter security services as compared to the scenario in developed nations

Conclusion

Through the research study conducted, it became clear that such a study addressing the various challenges faced by individuals working as security guards is fundamental to understanding their status in society. In terms of the primary objectives, the researcher was able to discover the various challenges faced by security guards working for different establishments in the area of Teynampet. The study enabled the researcher to identify the socio-economic factors such as family size, the number of earning individuals in a family and financial obligations leading to employment as security guards. The study also rendered significant information about the involvement of security agencies in the recruitment of security guards and their role in allocating duties to security guards. Based on the responses collected through the interviews, the exploitation of security guards professionally

by overworking them beyond their job description and financially by charging a high commission fee was also discovered. Aided by the questions in the interview about the social implications of the job, the study was able to elicit the perspective of security guards on how they are treated by the general public that they interact. They appreciated their job for giving them the opportunity and space to interact with a large number of people every day, which they would not be able to do if they had gone into retirement.

Recommendations

Through the research study conducted, it was observed that a vast number of senior citizens beyond their retirement age are currently employed in the organized sector of security services. Keeping in mind this fact, security agencies and the government should consider new policies and welfare measures such as basic health insurance to safeguard their wellbeing. Future research and longitudinal studies can help uncover more about the long-term effects of working in the security sector and contribute to the academic information available related to the field of security guards. The study has identified the need for organizations to independently hire security guards and not rely upon middlemen like agencies in order to curb the exploitation of security guards. The formation of a security guards' union is also deemed necessary in order to rectify the power imbalance that is currently prevailing in the security sector and overcome other challenges as identified by the study.

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