

## Socio-economic conditions of Rishi community in Khulna City Corporation (KCC)

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### Abstract

Rishi is an untouchable community in society victims of various socio-economic disparities as well as inequalities. This study aimed at identifying the socio-economic conditions of the Rishi community in Khulna City, Bangladesh. The purpose of the study is to observe how to maintain their social life along with economic activities. Following the survey and case study (Mixed method) research design, a sample of 150 people was selected clusterly from 'Rishipalli' (Ward No 24) as well as data were collected by administering a semi-structured questionnaire. Findings reveal that the majority of the respondent (98%) are Sanatan believers and accomplished primary level (32%) of education. Moreover, the maximum of respondents is cobbler (70%) as well as evolved dual income (44%). Furthermore, the higher percentage (43%) belong to monthly food expenditures ranging between BDT 3001 to BDT 5000, and the majority (56%) of the households have to bear medical costs of BDT 100 to BDT 500 per month during illness, 36 percent of the households seeking treatment from MBBS doctor. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that policymakers should develop effective measures to improve the conditions of Rishi people, emphasizing building awareness of their socio-economic issues.

**Keywords:** Rishi; minority; community; social and economic

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### Introduction

The Rishi community is a small minority group, considered intangible, who are generally engaged in repairing and polishing shoes (Beg, Khan, Afrina, Hossain, & Zayed, 2020). These people are disrespected in society because of low education rates and mental barriers. The people of this community also remain in lower economic conditions for this reason. They belong to clusters in different areas, most of those located in *Khas* land along with situated outside of the localities (Saha & Paul, 2003). Moreover, they are a socially marginalized class as well as being discriminated against in society since their history (Saha & Paul, 2003). However, in Bangladesh, it has received much attention as a social and legal improvement over the last decades.

The cobbler community is one of the lowest castes in the caste system, indicating their existence and fate in life. Though their lifestyles and characteristics are somewhat different from other people, the socioeconomic conditions of this community, along with other exploited classes properly, are because they have been living in all the parts of the subcontinents (Uddin, 2015). They involved too low social conditions that changed their traditional occupation and engaged in new occupations (Toppo, Rahman, Ali, & Javed, 2016). The majority of children in the community are deprived of education as well as there is no historical evidence that they were rewarded financially or socially (Pal, Mazumder, Akter, Khatun, & Alam, 2017). Poor economic conditions and higher costs of education lead to creating less interest in education and de-motivate them from education. Most of the houses in this community are of low standard, and they live in a hut that is made of straw and bamboo (Martin et al., 2020). Although the *Rishilpi* used to lead an



affluent as well as peaceful life in the past, their economic and social conditions are now very backward day by day. In their opinion, they have been neglected by the higher caste community, and they do not get proper respect from them. They have not been invited to any functions of society, such as marriage ceremonies, death anniversaries, and others. Actually, no classification has not found among the people in that community (Maitrot & Chakma, 2017). The great social reformer Swami Vivekananda urged the people of higher classes to give rights to the downtrodden the society (Bibekananda, 1977).

Moreover, the economic situation of this community is very miserable today all over the country, but in different areas, they really lead a very hardship life (Spejjer & Sarker, 2015). It has been very much difficult today for the cobbler due to the use of modern machinery for the production of shoes (Rashid, 2007). The economic condition of this community is vulnerable, living from hand to mouth. They possess a variety of occupation which is different from others in society, and for this reason, their occupation is considered low in society. Their main occupation is to repair and polish shoes, repair bags, and others (UNICEF, 2010). Though their main occupation is repairing and polishing shoes, now a day they are involved in different types of occupations, *i. e.* Barber, Day Labor, Farmer, Handicraft, Petty Business, Shopkeeper, and so on (Greene & Merrick, 2008). In their opinion, their income is not satisfactory, even sometimes they have to go hungry when they do not find any work (Halder & Urey, 2013).

However, different organizations provide loans and financial support for the education of their children and animal husbandry, especially for women. They also provide relief, such as food, cloth, medicine, pure drinking water, and others, during natural disasters. This study focuses on several minorities and untouchable groups in our society. Due to various reasons like lack of education, extreme poverty, lack of proper healthy atmosphere, and others. They could not manage themselves to establish their rights (Darlington, 2015). Consequently, they remain out of development efforts, untouchable and downtrodden in the community (Ademmer et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in Bangladesh's case, no scholarly studies have been conducted on the socio-economic conditions of the Rishi community in Khulna City. So, the purpose of this paper is to explore two questions: a) What is the social condition of the Rishi community, and b) what are the economic conditions of the Rishi community in the context of Bangladesh?

## **Methods**

This study investigates the survey and case study (Mixed method) research design. This study is descriptive and exploratory in nature to obtain and illustrate the basic features of the data in the study, and the study was carried out at *Rishipalli* of *Gallamari* (Ward No 24), at *Sonadanga* thana under the Khulna district of Bangladesh. Some specifications were made to identify the respondents to achieve the study objectives; the data were collected from (i) the head of the household; (ii) belonged to the active population. (iii) live in the selected study area for at least five years. According to the aforesaid criterion, people of the Rishi community were selected through cluster sampling because of the choice of only certain groups from the entire population. According to them, about 300-400 people live in that community, and 150 informants are maintained by the unit of analysis. In qualitative research, there were accomplished 6 case studies after pretesting from 10 informants; even some informants (4 informants) were excluded for providing irrelevant and incomplete data. Primary data collected from respondents, along with secondary data, have already been published, which is used to make an assessment of the quality of the information provided and to identify bias and pure imagination (Walliman, 2021). Data were collected by administering a semi-structured questionnaire. A questionnaire containing both open and closed questions in English was designed for data collection focusing on the socio-economic conditions of the Rishi Community. The study's fieldwork was accomplished from January 23 to August 25, 2020. The researcher edited, coded, classified, and cleaned the raw data before the analysis started. Tabulated data were preceded by computerizing and using software like SPSS and MS Word. Answers from the respondents were counted through different values given in the questionnaire. After data processing, data analysis and interpretation have done by

using statistical techniques using different software like (SPSS-20 and MS Word). Additionally, mean, and standard deviation are calculated along with frequencies and percentages.

## Results and Discussion

### Personal information of the respondents

Data presented in Table 1 enumerate that approximately 44 percent of respondents belonged to the age group 33 to 49 years as well as most of the respondents (96%) were male, whereas 98 percent followed the Sanatan religion. From observing Table 1, it is found that 40 percent of major respondents evolved monthly income from BDT 5001 to BDT 7000, and the average income is BDT 6707. In the study area, the majority of the respondents (96%) were married, and only 2 percent of the respondents were divorced. Most of the respondents have either primary (32%) or secondary education (26%), and only 4 percent have completed higher secondary education and above. A higher percentage (70%) were the cobbler and day laborers (12%), along with a significant portion (8%) who were engaged in petty business among the respondents.

**Table 1.**  
Personal information of the respondents

Variables	Number(f)	Percentage (%)
Age structure of the respondents		
≤32	39	26.0
33-49	66	44.0
50≥	45	30.0
Mean: 41.48	Std. Deviation: 11.145	
Sex structure of the respondents		
Male	144	96.0
Female	6	4.0
Religion of the respondents		
Sanatan	147	98.0
Christianity	3	2.0
Monthly income of the respondent (in BDT)		
≤5000	48	32.0
5001-7000	60	40.0
7001≥	42	28.0
Mean: 6707.00	Std. Deviation: 2414.793	
Marital status of the respondents		
Married	144	96.0
Divorced	6	4.0
Year of schooling of the respondents (in years)		
Non-literate	57	38.0
Primary (i-v)	48	32.0
Secondary (vi-x)	39	26.0
Higher Secondary and above (xi≥)	6	4.0
Mean: 3.78	Std. Deviation: 3.787	
Occupation of the respondents		
Barber	15	10.0
Cobbler	105	70.0
Day Labor	18	12.0
Petty Business	12	8.0

(Source: Field Survey, 2020)

### Information about the spouses and family of the respondents

Table 2 elucidates that 41.7 percent of the respondent's spouse age was more than and equal to 36 years, and the average age is 32.52 years. The highest portion (37.5%) of the respondents' spouses were non-literate, followed by around 33.3 percent who have either primary education and 18.8 percent who have completed secondary education and above, with an average of only 2.56. Among the respondents, the highest, 74 percent, lived in the nuclear family, and only 26 percent of respondents lived in a joint family; following 56 percent of households were dependent on a single income, whereas 44 percent of families were dependent on dual income. Data presented in Table 2 show that 56 percent of the household had 4-5 people, and the average number of family members was 4.34.

**Table 2.**  
Information about spouses and family of the respondents

Variables	Number(f)	Percentage (%)
Age structure of the spouses		
≤25	54	37.5
26-35	30	20.8
36≥	60	41.7
Mean: 32.52	Std. Deviation: 10.061	
Year of schooling of the spouses		
Non-literate	69	47.9
Primary (i-v)	48	33.3
Secondary (vi-x)	27	18.8
Mean: 2.56	Std. Deviation: 3.010	
Type of family of the respondents (nature)		
Nuclear	111	74.0
Joint	39	26.0
Type of family of the respondents (income)		
Single-Earned	84	56.0
Dual Income	66	44.0
Size of the family		
2-3	39	26.0
4-5	84	56.0
6≥	27	18.0
Mean: 4.34	Std. Deviation: 1.206	

(Source: Field Survey, 2020)

### Monthly household expenditure of the respondents

Data in the following Table 3 reveal that the higher percentage (43%) belonged to monthly food expenditure ranging between BDT 3001 to BDT 5000, and the average food expenditure was BDT 3910. Among the majority of the respondents (56%) of the households had to bear the medical cost of BDT 100 to BDT 500 per month, whereas only 4 percent had no pressure of medical cost. In the study area, 48 percent of the households having an education cost of 50 to 500 BDT per month, whereas the average education cost was BDT 399; following that, more than half of the households (52%) having expenditure miscellaneous items ranged was BDT 1000 to BDT 3000 and only 8 percent household expenditure is BDT 3001≥.

**Table 3.**

Monthly household expenditure of the respondents		
Variables	Number (f)	Percentage (%)
Monthly household expenditure in (BDT) food		
1000-3000	61	41.0
3001-5000	65	43.0
5001-7000	24	16.0
Mean: 3910.00	Std. Deviation: 1304.193	
Monthly household expenditure in (BDT) medical		
No	6	4.0
100-500	84	56.0
501-1000	42	28.0
1000≥	18	12.0
Mean: 708.00	Std. Deviation: 595.850	
Monthly household expenditure in (BDT) education		
No	48	32.0
50-500	72	48.0
501-1000	18	12.0
1001≥	12	8.0
Mean: 399.00	Std. Deviation: 521.525	
Monthly household expenditure in miscellaneous		
≤1000	60	40.0
1001-3000	78	52.0
3001≥	12	8.0
Mean: 1542.80	Std. Deviation: 1182.391	

(Source: Field Survey, 2020)

### Information about housing/water/sanitation/energy facilities

Data in Table 4 expose that more than half of the respondents (60%) lived in a *kacha* house, whereas most of the respondents (98%) lived in their own house, and only 2 percent of the respondent given the house rent. The finding shows that the majority (60%) of the households had personal latrines, and among them, 40 percent of the households used common latrines. Apart from 60 percent of the households had electricity facility as the source of energy and besides the majority of the households (82%) used wood for fuel purpose.

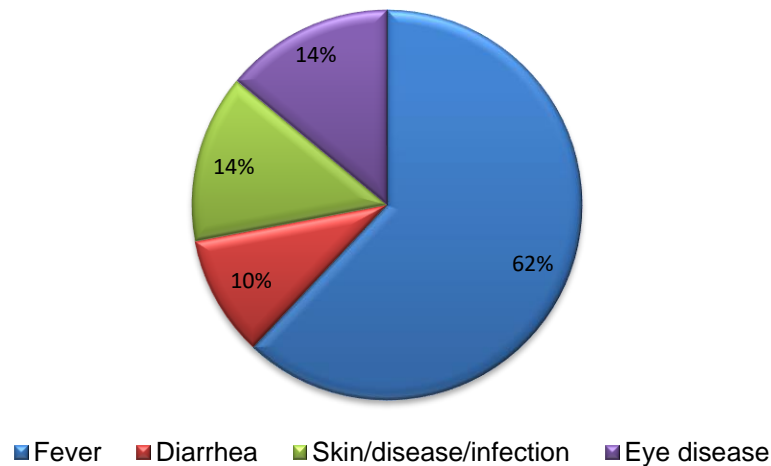
**Table 4.**

Information about house/water/sanitation/energy		
Variables	Number (f)	Percentage (%)
Type of house		
<i>Pacca</i>	6	4.0
<i>Semi-pacca</i>	54	36.0
<i>Kacha</i>	90	60.0
Nature of house		
Own	147	98.0
Rent	3	2.0
Nature of sanitation system		
Personal	90	60.0
Common	60	40.0
Main source of energy		
Electricity	90	60.0
Kerosene	60	40.0
Main source of fuel		
Electricity	18	12.0
Wood/Bora	132	88.0

(Source: Field Survey, 2020)

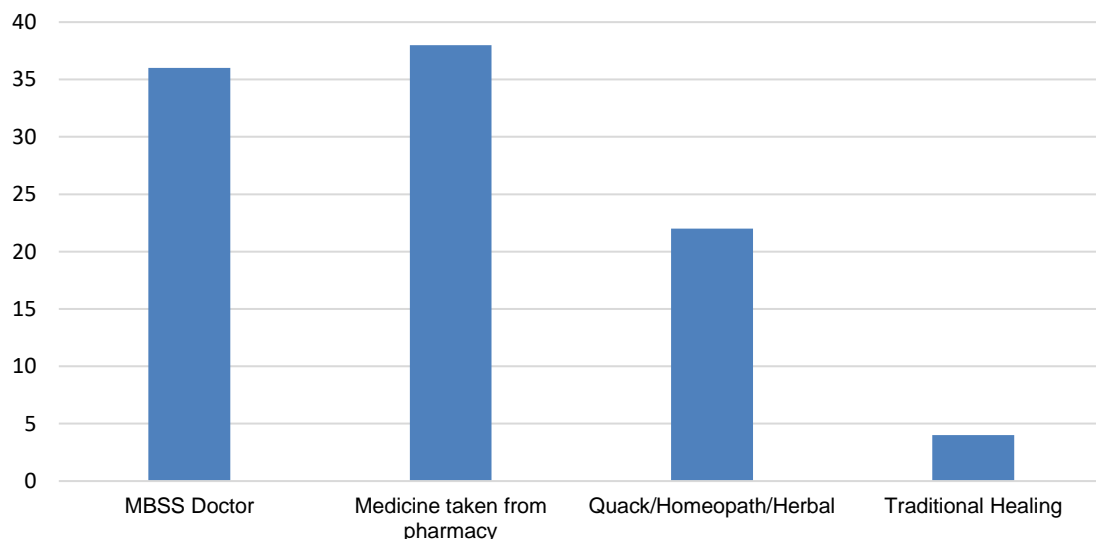
### Most common illness suffered by the family members

Data presented in Graph 1 explain that mostly 62 percent of the family members suffered from fever along with skin diseases, 14 percent. Apart from this, in Graph 1, diarrhea and eye disease, respectively, 10 percent and 8 percent of households suffered.



**Graph 1.**  
Most common illness suffered by the family members  
(Source: Field Survey, 2020)

Data indicate in Graph 2 that during illness, 36 percent of the household's seeking treatment from an MBBS doctor, 38% of medicine taken from the pharmacy, among them 22 percent took homeopath/herbal treatment, and only 4 percent took traditional healing.



**Graph 2.**  
During illness place to seek treatment  
(Source: Field Survey, 2020)

Rishi community is disadvantaged psychologically, socially, economically, and politically along with discrimination and disproportionate allocation of resources conserves which contribute to creating a disparity in the socio-economic conditions between the majority and minority groups in

Bangladesh (Uddin, 2015). This study highlights such a group of working people who are engaged in shoe polishing or repairing, washing cloth, and cutting hair in Khulna city as well as market corner, depicting the socio-economic situation in their work in comparison with housing life and giving attention to problems and suggestive measures with changing society, especially these communities. The age of the household head determines the socio-economic condition of the household, as occupational status and income largely depend on age (Ghosh, 2010). Data were collected from the head of the households; among them, the highest, 44 percent, were in the age group 33 to 49 years. A higher percentage of household heads were married, following the rest widow and divorced. Apart from this, more than half of the respondents were cobblers following the small number of skilled laborers, farmers, petty-business, shopkeepers, and barbers with a poor average income of BDT 6707. The occupational status of an individual is very important in determining economic status as among the occupational groups, the poverty incidence also varies (Haq & Ahmad, 2001). Education is the key indicator of the social status of a person and can reduce poverty in a number of the society (Speijer & Sarker, 2015). It is noteworthy that 38 percent of the respondents were non-literate, with only 32 percent primary and 26 percent secondary education; the average residential duration of the households was 53.34 years. ND expressed that,

“He read only class five and his wife is totally illiterate, even cannot sign their name. His three daughters go to school but another daughter does not go to school. Though his main occupation is cobbler but he has to work as labor in several times to maintain his family generally earning about 7000 taka per month” (Case Study 1).

The total family members of most of the households (56%) are composed of 4-5 members, with an average of 4.34. SR said,

“He has to live from hand to mouth as our total dual income is not sufficient at all in proportion of our whole family members. Though he is the chief of his family but both he and his wife take all the decision about her familial matter” (Case Study 3).

During the last decade, the changes in socio-economic conditions have affected the monthly household expenditure of households i. e. food, medical, education, and others expenditure (Halder & Urey, 2013). The average food expenditure of the households was BDT 3910, following BDT 708, the average medical cost, BDT 399, the average education cost, and BDT 1542.80, the average expenditure on miscellaneous items. In the study area, less than half of the households (46%) were tally, and (36%) were tin shed houses, following 60 percent *kacha* and (36%) semi-*pacca* houses; among them (98%) lived in their own house. In most of the houses, the ceiling was made of tally (46%) and tin (36%), following the wall was made of Concrete (44%), earth (42%), and bamboo (12%). MD said, “He has no knowledge about land rights or political rights which they can demand to the government as a minority group. Government has never taken any steps to protect or promote their rights” (Case Study 5). Besides, the floor of more than half (76%) of the houses was made of earth, following 22 percent concrete. Most of the households (96%) collected drinking water from deep tube-well and about 56 percent used tube well as their secondary sources of water. The majority of the households (60%) had personal latrines, and about 66 percent used fixed *kacha* latrines. Most of the households (60%) had electricity facility as the source of power and all of them also had to pay the electricity bills and (82%) households used wood for the fuel. RK mentioned that,

“Though electricity is available in his community but they have no electrical facility in his house due to financial crisis and his main energy sources is kerosene and mainly woods are used for fuel purpose. He collects drinking water from a deep tube-well, the only source pure drinking water in his community” (Case Study 4).

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Diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, dengue and hypertension, asthma and skin diseases, and others, are also increasing in Bangladesh, which is closely interlinked with water supply, sanitation, and food production (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2015). TR explored that,

“He lives in *kacha* house having two rooms made of mud and tally as there is not sufficient space into the rooms, they have to live congested. The housing construction is not well planned and their sanitation system is not healthy at all as a result they are affected by different types of communicable diseases” (Case Study 2).

EP declared that,

“The most distressing thing is that when a girl becomes pregnant, she is sent back to her father’s place to bring dowry and she is told not to come back if she fails to bring dowry. Even this practice is rife in the barber community as well as in the age of globalization they want to mix with other people in the society and get rid of these problems. For this people from all walks of life will have to stand against the unjust social discrimination represented by the elites” (Case Study 6).

Socially they are neglected, posing a very low status in society from the higher caste community. There are many barriers including for accomplishing the research, such as time management for data collection from respondents, faced shyness about their current situation in society, and even they would feel marginalized. Different types of organizations, such as ASA, BRAC, Grameen Bank, ADDIN *somiti*, and others, are working on the community basically for the purpose of their help (Martin et al., 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Despite being Bangladeshi citizens, minor and untouchable groups, including the Rishi community in the society, are victims of social disparities and inequalities. The socio-economic condition of Rishi is not well off, and they live on the poverty line belonging very unhygienic environmental area. In most cases, they cannot meet their basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, education, and health facilities as well as their category of occupation is in such a situation that they cannot lead a better life. In our constitution, their rights are not truly reflected, and they deprive of their actual privileges. They could not appear as a strong as well as powerful cluster due to various pitfalls such as poor economic conditions and socio-economic drawbacks. No proper initiatives or actions have been taken to improve their socio-economic and livelihood conditions by the government and assigned authorities. Thus, they remain poor with good craftsmanship over the centuries. Specific programs and actions should be taken by the government to improve a healthy and hygienic atmosphere. However, the government and authorities could take such an initiative in which they will get all facilities to live their livelihood under one umbrella, live become meaningful and magnificent to them.

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