



THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ROMA GYPSIES IN SPAIN

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Abstract

The Roma Gypsies, as the largest ethnic minority groups of Europe, are underrepresented in the local labour market due to the cultural status, ethnicity, historical, and social identity and, their marginalized status by the lack of education. Roma is bereft of basic government schemes viz. full citizenship, economic entitlement and development of social welfare schemes. After decades of state-funded service provisions through the non-governmental organizations in Spain, the development of Roma has remained static. In the name of the formal vocational training and skill programmes, the 'Spanish Roma Inclusion Model' has become a myth for their socio-economic development. The Roma organizations stand against discrimination and social exclusion that faced by Roma from all walks of life. Using the purposive sampling method, 52 Roma workers who engaged in informal and recycling sector were studied from Bilbao City of Basque region of Spain Country. Three research questions were made to investigate the impact the education and employment on quality of life aspects for Roma people. The study concluded the lower level of education is likely to push Roma workers into high risk and inevitable job insecurity and health precariousness than immigrants in Spain. The Roma organizations have often urged the Spanish government to execute serious implementation for education interventions as well as deliverables of basic needs and goods to the Roma Gypsies.

Keywords: Job insecurity, Social inclusion, Job satisfaction, ethnicity, Roma civil society



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Introduction

Many transnational immigrants suffer social exclusion, or affirmative discrimination policies, on the basis of identity, and in many places this occurs without intervention of globalization process (Beall: 2002; Sen & Kabeer: 2000). Roma Gypsies (Gitanos Vasco)¹ are originally from different European regions, ethnicities and brotherhoods with community support and solidarity networks. According to the National Action Plan, Spanish Roma Gypsies are poor and most disadvantaged and marginalized groups than the immigrants in Spain. They are not an officially recognized ethnic minority in the country, and Roma civil society is for the most part in a pitiful state. After decades of state-funded service provisions through non-governmental organizations in Spain, the development of Roma remains static.

The so called ‘Spanish Roma Inclusion Model’ becomes a myth for the Roma civil society organisations. The marginalized condition of Roma especially women are bereft of major government schemes viz. full citizenship, economic entitlements, developmental and welfare schemes. They are deprived of formal schooling. Consequently, they traditionally get engaged in lowest skilled and low paid jobs in labour market. In public spheres, these groups probably face disparaging remarks across all walks of life; i.e. ‘Second class citizenship’, ‘Unsociable behaviour’; ‘Stateless life’; and ‘Illegal residents’ and so and so forth. They are not yet fully integrated in Spanish social, cultural, economical, political and religious milieus.

In the study, a main concern is to discuss invariable reasons for declining the traditional Roma labour market and social outcomes of economic crisis in Spain. The proposed study examines social exclusion and quality of life related processes. The social exclusion as a multi-dimensional concept can redefine the pre-determined vulnerabilities of Roma in respect to their quality of life domains, i.e. low educational level- early school drop-out; generally losing touch with traditional professions and labour activities; poor housing and living conditions; inadequate access and use (either due to abuse, stigma and shortage of general services); prejudices, stereotypes, and high level of social discrimination; and lastly the lack of cultural recognition.

A crucial element understanding the social exclusion as discussed here is sense of job insecurity. In recent decades, the perceptions of job insecurity in ethnic communities have become a serious concern for researchers. To understand the ethnic exclusion in Spain, the proposed research has reviewed the quality of life studies in Europe and the implications of social exclusion approach. Several European quality of life surveys have extensively focused on the living and economic condition of people, even people’s perceptions about the society where they live. The quality of life of Spanish Roma continues to be a subject of debate. The employment insecurity could be defined ‘the perceived powerlessness to maintain a desired continuity in the threatened job situation’. In the viewpoints, the research objectives are delineated to examine the quality of life domain:

1. To understand the impact of social exclusion on the quality of life of Roma Gypsies.
2. To examine the level of job dissatisfaction and employment insecurity in labour market.
3. To examine the gender, labour and ethnicity as multiple source of exclusion.

Literature Review

In past two decades, the issues of the Roma Gypsies, refugees and immigrants have thoroughly studied through the academic disciplines like racial and ethnic studies, ethnology and Diaspora studies, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and economics. However, the integral studies in such disciplines have focused on the areas of history, culture, genetic studies, neighbourhood discrimination, housing segregation, and education deprivation (Lopez & Beltran: 2009). In totality, the Roma are deprived from basic access to education, health and employment. Due to the fact that the quality of life approach can transcend to living conditions approach, that tends to focus on material resources (money, access to goods and services) available to individuals and to incorporating socio-economic indicators; happiness, freedom to choose one's lifestyle and a subjective wellbeing. The concept is a multi-dimensional and measurable with objective and subjective socio-cultural indicators. Todorov (1977:52) explains the quality of life is a rigorous sociological term that reflects the level of satisfaction in spiritual, intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, ethical and other needs of the people, which also determined to the great extent by a subjective evaluative attitude of person towards one's life activity and condition. Drawing upon the conceptual understanding, there is great deals of academic policy research on the quality of life for Roma have done in the context of health, social wellbeing and other aspects. However, there are no enough precedents in understanding social exclusion approach and issues of quality of life to Roma Gypsies regarding the social, economical, employment and health security spheres.

Barnes (2006) asserted to the impact of social exclusion on quality of life aspects he found that "there appears to be a link between multiple exclusions and quality of life or well-being of the vulnerable sections. Barnes argued that the social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional process.² It involves the lack of denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural arenas. It affects both quality of life of individuals as well as the equity and cohesion of society as a whole. Shucksmith (2009), Social exclusion encompasses the lower level of perceived welfare and quality of life due to the fact that those explain subjective and objective measuring of individual experience of multiple deprivations. Shucksmith assumed the quality of life can be conceived by three different levels: Individual level, meso/group level (e.g., family community) and macro level (e.g. country, society). However, the employment and economic status is a central measurement for individual's quality of life. It is due to lack of job

opportunities, difficult housing condition, and poor material condition. The quality of life concept has three principle characteristics. Thereby, it focuses on the individual's situation and their perceptions (a micro concept) rather than the country's quality of life, it is multidimensional, covering multiple life domains and their interplay, and bringing together the objective information on living conditions with subjective views and attitudes to provide a picture of overall well-being in society. In terms of subjective domain are included the study of life satisfaction, happiness and sense of belonging. Royuela and Lopez's (2009) study "Results of a Quality of Work Life Index in Spain: A Comparison of Survey Results and Aggregate Social Indicators", which published as a national Survey on quality of life in work activity, underscored the quality of work life can be a one of measurable component in studying the quality of life at a subjective level and underlined 'Quality of work life is a key element in promoting employment in a competitive and inclusive knowledge economy. A quality reflects the desire, not just to defend minimum standards, but to promote rising standards and ensure a more equitable sharing of progress.'

Conceptual Implications of Social Exclusion

In social sciences, the term social exclusion has been used as a broad conceptual and theoretical framework to measure the manifold domains of quality of life. Social exclusion has become a key concept in the measurement and description of wellbeing and life chances. Social exclusion is associated with concepts of discrimination, isolation, vulnerability, marginalization and lack of integration, or their positive counterparts, the concepts of integration, solidarity, participation and social cohesion (Allen et al., 1998; Drangland & Haarstad: 2009). The European social planning today is highly influenced by what may be called 'Discourse on social exclusion' from 1990s and even extending the issues of poverty and class. Initially, the social exclusion as a term was introduced in social sciences in the early 1990s in order to extend the focus beyond the poverty by focusing the relation between the individual and the society. An intrinsic question is how useful is the concept of social exclusion can be applied and measured to Quality of Life aspects in Spanish context. Exclusion on one or more dimensions has a severe negative impact on quality of life. Social exclusion is not just a denial of material security, but rather includes being cut off from society more generally. Social exclusion as a process and a state that prevents individuals or groups from a full participation in social, economic and political spheres and from asserting their rights (DFID: 2005).

Social exclusion is not a static; in fact, it is a kind of process or processes of marginalization and discrimination which are occurred in the everyday lives and interactions of the individuals or groups. The term 'exclusion' has become a vocabulary in Europe and other developing society viz. poverty or unemployment. It emphasizes social factors such as housing, health, employment and education. It gets excluded certain communities and groups from the social interaction and access to basic resources through social arrangements, normative value system and customs. Ziyauddin and Poggi examined the contours of exclusive dimensions which are defined non-economic aspects and for measurement of high deprivation for individual experience as being an excluded; i.e. 'living in a safe and clean environment', "having adequate income", "being healthy", and "being able to perform work activities". In first process, an individual could be heterogeneous with respect to characteristics that are relevant for the chance of experiences and persistence of the social exclusion. This study suggested that the initial deprivation of socially excluded individuals has highest probabilities; of not being able to reach a certain quality of life, healthcare or to be fulfilled with basic needs. Thus, the study explores the scope of improvement in policies which could address issue of social exclusion; especially to the education and health domains for Basque Roma Gypsies. Defining varied nature of the social exclusion concept, the quality of life aspects can be revealed the status quo of Roma Gypsies in Spain by investigating following research questions:

1. How does the low education status result the inevitable job insecurity for the Roma workers in Spanish labour market?
2. How do labour interventions by Roma specific inclusion policies prevent Roma to adapt the needs of labour market?
3. How could the analytical and theoretical nature of social exclusion approach be resolved the plight of Roma workers across quality of life spheres?

Methods and Sampling

This study aimed to measure various parameters related to job insecurity and job dissatisfaction level for Roma people in Spain. Prior empirical studies on European immigrants, refugees and Diasporas have pointed out existing trends in social exclusion and inclusive education policies on Roma issues for Spain. The study was conducted in Bilbao City in the Basque province of Spain during the 2009-10. The study surveyed 52 Roma individual workers who consisted of 36 men and 16 women by using purposive sampling method. Besides, the questionnaire schedule was prepared for detailed interview with

representatives of Roma NGOs. To highlight quality of life aspects of Roma, the questionnaire covered some indicators related to labour issues; income; work life balance; education attainment, work accessibility, school, family and services; social and community participation. The perceptions of Roma workers over a level of job satisfaction and job insecurity were scaled up across gender, ethnicity and labour issues.

Results

The quality of life of Roma are perceived as poor working condition, low income groups, less autonomy and job instability. Regarding the socio-economic status of Roma, the vicious circle of poverty persist the unemployment, the lower level of job satisfaction and social exclusion. The plight of Roma is probably seen due to increasingly changing forms of technological innovation in neoliberal economy of Spain. Explaining the educational status of Roma, nearly 31% Roma were found the illiterate, whereas 69% found literate. Majority literate Roma could finish their education up to the secondary level either by the formal education degree or mobile schools. In last decade, the services of mobile schools have especially laid down on the experimental basis for reaching out Roma literacy programme on ghettos in rural areas of Spain. To the employment condition, nearly 56% of Roma occupied the self-employed jobs in recycling and itinerant trades. Following, few of them were engaged in cleaning and other semi-skilled jobs based on a short term municipal contracts. Less than 10% of literate Roma are engaged in white collar jobs as social educators and NGO executives from various Roma organizations in Bilbao. Due to having limited opportunities in labour market, as many as ½ Roma workers are engaged in auxiliary informal jobs which could be classified as irregular, part-time, underpaid, free-lance, and self-employed jobs in tertiary sector. Barely 56% of Roma are employed on the permanent and fixed- term contracts in local labour market.

Measuring the Job Security Parameters

According to Hans de Witte (2005: 187), the job security can be defined as a subjective concern regarding future existence of the actual job, or of valued job featured of such job. Therefore, the perception of job security is associated to positional and organizational variables, which reflect (weak and vulnerable) position of an individual in the labour market. Drawing the job security parameters, there were mapped 11 group categories for analysis based on gender and labour. It is described that the internal and external forces in labour market may jeopardize livelihood and job prospects for Roma workers. Mostly 97% of Roma male workers are found dissatisfied for their jobs due to unlimited working hours in

their jobs and self-employed businesses; while 8% got dissatisfied due to having a tough and bored nature of work. To Roma female workers, mostly 88% of them are found dissatisfied in the jobs and businesses due to increasing economic crisis, prohibited laws and sanitation technology which brings their survival at the high risk. In general, the lower level of education and contingent employment could be one of the reasons for perceiving dissatisfaction for Roma workers. Such status quo can push them out in the fringe of insecurity. Thus, the risk of job insecurity may effect on the quality of life. The risk in terms of the job insecurity has mostly occurred due to increasingly decline of traditional occupations of Roma. In respect to the same, there is measured a vast effect on quality of life in the domains of individual wellbeing, health and household affordability.

Individual Wellbeing: Health related Gender Status

The individual wellbeing of Roma workers can be perceived by observing the health and gender issues in their households. As far as the unevenness in gender and occupation are concerned, as many as 50% (18 out of 36) Roma men were likely to be dissatisfied to their occupational health due to precariousness and deterioration at their workplaces. Particularly Roma groups, those who mostly affected by the lack of health facilities were the self-employed workers where most of them have to stay away from homes for jobs. Approximate 44% (23 of 52) Roma workers were found dissatisfied for these reasons. As a result, 38 (73%) Roma were benefited by Basque Country's social security benefits scheme as the recipients for paying the house rent allowances. Therefore, it has been argued most of Roma families, whom the study sampled, are patronized by the Basque government by providing the social minimum benefits.

In addressing the gender and of related health problems, the social educator Mrs. Josue Bautista from Baracaldo Gypsy Association (AGB)³, stated:

In Roma families, women do not equally treat by men on the line of equality in responsibilities and distributions of resources. Their domestic labour in the family and the labour market are downgraded by the patriarchal domination. They have to face severe health diseases and multiple risks when they are engaged in informal jobs. Women are traditionally controlled by patriarchal norms and male dominance. It is found a quite high fertility rate among them, in which most of pregnancies are occurred in the teenage and pre-marital age. The information regarding health which is furnished by State Municipalities and NGOs for vulnerable sections regarding policy of family planning is inadequate. No effective childbirth control methods are used. There are caused a chauvinist mindset in Roma culture; scarcity of

information from public domains; lack of medical facilities over the gynecological disorder; a premature ageing and discrepancies; i.e. diabetes, bone ailments and cardiovascular problems. For Roma women, the responsibilities in households and outside workplaces are caused enormous burden, anxiety and suffering. Speaking on public medical facilities for the Roma, only a single general medical practitioner is appointed to provide health consultation; whereas the city hospitals having adequate medical infrastructure and flow of specialist doctors. But the medical facilities are provided to the local citizens at free of charge. In case, the neighbourhood doctors unable to cure patients, they are recommended to send to the specialists. It is probably seen that most of Roma women unable to visit the doctors and the gynecologists due to cultural impediments from their families. As far as the guaranteed economic security for the unemployed citizens of Spain, most of the registered Roma recipients have to face serious obstacles while entitling regular benefits (rent payment for house). As a result, it could be often observed that the young generation belonged to Roma likely to attract to drug addictions. In most of cases, the empirical data procured from the government health reports have underlined high incidents due to infectious diseases from men to women. No medical history of Roma women is considered by their families, neither the regular medical check-up. Consequently, the mortality rate among women reported higher due to home casualties with no health prescription. Thus, the life expectancy is found as on an average up to 60 years for women and 55 years for men. The mortality rate of Roma people has tremendously increased in the last two decades.

Thus, the study argued the social exclusion approach is creditable in guiding and synthesizing research on vulnerable groups and communities. Its preliminary attempt is to map the inclusive policies in social, economic, cultural and political fields for the liberation. To Roma, the social exclusion approach helps examining reasons of social and occupational stigma and of increasing interracial stereotype and xenophobia in the Spanish society. It also entails the issues of labour market participation, social integration and to be decent life chances in all forms.

Conclusion: In conclusion, Roma workers were reported the level of their job dissatisfaction has accounted deplorable as compared to other immigrant workers in Spain. The study, therefore, sought further reasons to be caused the job dissatisfaction; the majority of Roma workers have to consume most of their time in the week engaging in regular jobs and business activities; many of them have to experienced the forced displacement during the recession in industrial economy and the enforcement of the prohibitory laws by local

administrative governments on the scrap collection activities; strict regulation over use of industrial recycling technologies; many of them have to experience isolation from mainstream Spanish society; and most of them have to suffer the underestimated feeling by mainstream Spanish society based on nature of their jobs, ethnicity and income status. The fact that the low education has turned the most of the Roma into high level of job dissatisfaction and of insecurity as compared to other immigrant identities in Spain. Hence, the low level of education of Roma Gypsies likely to face prolonged job dissatisfaction and of insecurity than immigrant groups in Spain. In gender views, there seems to be very severe for Roma women meeting the livelihood for their families and labour market participation. Thus, the process of Roma inclusion model by Basque Government has been urged serious challenges and drawbacks over the community intervention, implementation of schemes and the awareness drives as well as deliverables of resources for their sustainable lives of Roma Gypsies.

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Endnotes

¹ “Gitanos Vascos” is a term used to refer to the Basque Roma Gypsy or Romani communities in Spanish Basque Country. The word “Roma” is interchangeably used for the gypsies and gitanos. In this research, according to European parliamentary data (2004-2009) and social sciences as well as genetic research, there are around 12 to 15 million Roma living in the Europe; about 10 million live in EU countries are best described as conglomerate of genetically isolated founder populations. Furthermore, the problem most commonly faced by Roma population are racism and discrimination, low levels of education, high unemployment (50-90%), health standards well below those of the mainstream population, and very poor housing conditions.

² Barnes (2006) analyzes social exclusion across the further dimensions: social relationships (contact with family and friends), cultural activities (such as going to the cinema or theatre), civic activities (being a member of local interest group, undertaking volunteering or voting), access to the basic services (such as health services and shops), neighborhood exclusion (feeling safe in your local areas), financial products (such as bank account, long term saving), and material consumption.

³ One formal interview was held with Social Educator Mrs. Josue Bautista, Baracaldo Gypsy Association (NGO) at Bilbao city of the Basque Country on May, 2010. The interview was intended to understand the policy implications by the Spain Country for socio-economic development and improvements in quality of life of the Roma Gypsies. Her reflections also drew out to redefining the concept of Social Exclusion in the contemporary Europe.