

**EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL STIGMA AMONG HARITHA
KARMA SENA MEMBERS IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

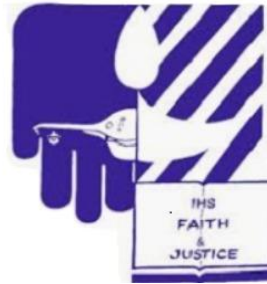
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Requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree Examination.*

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “**Experience of social stigma among Haritha karma sena members in Thiruvananthapuram district**” is a record of genuine work done by Ms. **Anjana A** fourth semester Master of Social Work student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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DECLARATION

I, **ANJANA A**, do hereby declare that the dissertation titled entitled “**Experience of social stigma among Haritha karma sena members in Thiruvananthapuram district**” is the result of my original research conducted during the academic years 2024-2026. This work is submitted to the University of Kerala as part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree Examination. I confirm that it has not been previously submitted for any other degree, diploma, fellowship, or similar academic recognition.

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on understanding the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. Haritha Karma Sena workers play a crucial role in decentralized waste management by collecting, segregating, and transporting household waste, thereby contributing significantly to environmental sustainability and public health. Despite their important role, many workers face social stigma, occupational challenges, inadequate recognition, and various socio-economic difficulties. The study aims to explore the forms of social stigma experienced by Haritha Karma Sena members, the impact of stigma on their personal and social lives, and the strategies they adopt to cope with such experiences.

The study adopted a qualitative multiple case study research design. Data were collected from eight Haritha Karma Sena members selected through purposive sampling from rural, urban, and coastal areas of Thiruvananthapuram District. Face-to-face guided interviews, observations, and relevant documents were used as sources of data. The collected information was analysed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns and experiences related to social stigma.

The findings reveal that Haritha Karma Sena members experience various forms of stigma, including negative labelling, disrespectful behaviour, social avoidance, and inadequate recognition from certain sections of society. Many participants reported being referred to as waste collectors in a derogatory manner and facing challenges related to improper waste segregation, delayed user-fee payments, low income, and limited welfare support. However, the study also found that public awareness regarding waste management has improved over time, leading to increased social acceptance and recognition in many communities. The use of uniforms and identity cards has further contributed to enhancing workers' dignity and visibility.

The study highlights the need for greater social recognition, awareness programmes, welfare measures, and policy interventions to reduce occupational stigma and improve the well-being of Haritha Karma Sena workers. Future research may further explore occupational stigma among waste management workers in different socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Haritha Karma Sena, Social Stigma, Occupational Stigma, Waste Management, Women Workers, Environmental Sustainability, Thiruvananthapuram.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Waste management is a global concern and plays a key role in the day today life of each and every citizen however considered as a challenge, threat or menace by different sections of the society. It is a resource for the rag pickers, itinerant buyers and scrap vendors who are in the fore front of waste management. It has a significant position to play in circular economy through hygienic handling with no harm on environment (recycling and value addition). Understanding the social responsibility and future scope, the Government of Kerala is planning to start recycling parks for promoting recycling of various items of the wastes that are usually disposed off unscientifically. (Ajesh antony, 2024).

Plastic has become an indispensable part of modern life due to its versatility, durability, and low cost. Global plastic production exceeds 150 million tonnes annually, and its consumption continues to rise rapidly. In India, per capita plastic consumption increased from approximately 1 kilogram in 1990 to about 15 kilograms in 2021, with total plastic consumption reaching nearly 21 million tonnes. A significant proportion of plastic packaging materials become waste within a short period after use, contributing to growing environmental concerns. It is estimated that India generates around 9.4 million tonnes of plastic waste annually. Although approximately 60% of this waste is recycled, largely through the efforts of the informal sector, a substantial quantity remains unmanaged and contributes to environmental pollution. Plastic waste poses serious threats to land, water resources, ecosystems, and public health because many plastic materials take hundreds of years to decompose.

There are no significant studies related to the functioning of waste management workers at Urban Local Body (ULB) level by government, private agencies or NGOs. So, there is an urgent need to study the pros and cons or strengths and weaknesses of the system in detail. Local Bodies, especially Urban local bodies are cardinal in Indian earth and that is why the 72 to 74th amendment of Indian Constitution had taken place (Pandey 2020). In exercise of the powers conferred by section 3,6 and 25 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (The Environment (Protection) Act 1986) and in supersession of the SWM Handling Rules 2000, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India introduced the Solid Waste Management Rules (SWM Rules) 2016 on 8th April 2016. As per the Rules (Solid Waste Management Rules 2016), Solid Waste means and includes solid or semi solid waste, sanitary waste,

commercial waste, institutional waste, catering and marketing waste and other nonresidential wastes, street sweepings, silt removed or collected from the surface drains, horticulture waste, agriculture, battery waste, radioactive waste, diary waste, treated biomedical waste excluding industrial waste, bio-medical waste and e-waste generated in the area under the local authorities and other entities mentioned in rule 2.

The Solid Waste Management Rules 2016 introduced by Government of India in tune with The Environment Protection Act (1986), give stress on integrated and scientific management of solid waste and mandates to integrate informal sector workers in SWM activities unequivocally in addition to stipulating time frame for each and every stakeholder to comply. In tune with the direction, Local Self-Government Department (LSGD), Government of Kerala decided to introduce the HKS system in the state by positioning informal sector women workers in the forefront for SWM. The present socio-economic status of the SWM workers is tried here to be brought to light. The key challenges and issues faced by them needed to be identified and suggestions also to be put forward to overcome the same. The legal backing, welfare measures and social security were looked into. The saving, income and expenditure pattern are assessed in view of the poverty standards. Being the informal sector a cushion for absorbing more unemployed people, it needs strategic attention. So, the present position of SWM sector as an employment provider is also assessed. Whether any social stigma is existing, whether they are part and parcel of the fabric of the society are also explored. (Prasad, 2024)

1.1.1 SOCIAL STIGMA

Social stigma refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and judgments directed toward individuals or groups because of a particular characteristic, condition, occupation, or social identity. People who are stigmatized are often viewed as different, inferior, undesirable, or socially unacceptable. As a result, they may experience discrimination, exclusion, rejection, and unequal treatment within society. Stigma is not limited to physical appearance or disability; it can also be associated with social status, occupation, caste, disease, economic condition, or any attribute that society perceives negatively. Individuals affected by stigma often face humiliation, social isolation, and loss of social status, which can negatively influence their quality of life and well-being. (singh, 2024)

The concept of stigma has evolved over time. According to Goffman (1963), stigma originates from the Greek practice of marking individuals who were considered socially undesirable. He described stigma as a “spoiled identity,” where a person is devalued because of a particular attribute that differentiates them from others. Later scholars expanded this understanding and emphasized that stigma is not merely an individual characteristic but a social process involving labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. Link and Phelan (2001) argued that stigma develops through social interactions and is influenced by broader social, cultural, economic, and political factors. Thus, stigma should be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon that shapes how individuals and groups are perceived and treated within society.

Stigma is deeply influenced by cultural and social norms. Research suggests that stereotypes and prejudices are often learned and reinforced through social interactions, communication, and cultural beliefs. Societies define what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, and individuals tend to adopt these collective views. As a result, certain groups become targets of stigma because they are perceived as different from dominant social expectations. Although stigma is a universal phenomenon, the groups that are stigmatized and the reasons for stigmatization vary across cultures and historical periods. What is considered stigmatizing in one society may not be viewed in the same way in another.

In the Indian context, stigma is closely connected to social hierarchies such as caste, gender, occupation, disability, poverty, and disease. Historically, certain groups were marginalized and excluded from mainstream society because they were considered impure, inferior, or inauspicious. Although legal and social reforms have reduced many forms of discrimination, stigma continues to exist in different forms. At the same time, Indian society has also demonstrated examples of inclusion, where some stigmatized groups have been assigned specific social or cultural roles. Nevertheless, many individuals and communities continue to experience prejudice, exclusion, and unequal treatment because of their social identity or circumstances.

The effects of stigma extend beyond social discrimination and can significantly affect psychological well-being. Stigmatized individuals often experience stress, fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, and feelings of insecurity. Continuous exposure to negative stereotypes and social rejection may lead to emotional distress and reduced confidence.

Stigma can also limit opportunities for social participation, employment, education, and access to resources. The experience of social exclusion often creates barriers that prevent individuals from fully exercising their rights and achieving social acceptance. Consequently, stigma becomes both a personal and social problem that affects individuals, families, and communities. (singh, 2024).

1.1.2 Haritha karma sena

The Haritha Karma Sena (HKS), a collaborative project that emphasizes local participation and responsibility in garbage management, is a notable example of this effort. The Haritha Karma Sena or "Green Task Force," is a squad of trained waste management Women professionals formed under Kerala's Suchitwa Mission the state's cleanliness project. HKS represents a strategic shift in Kerala's waste management practices, focusing on a comprehensive system of waste reduction, segregation, and recycling rather than just disposal. Women Members get waste collection and segregation training, as well as public waste management education, allowing HKS to function as both a service provider and a catalyst agent for social change.

The fundamental and vital functions of the Haritha Karma Sena include a complete approach to waste management, which includes the initiative of conducting door-to-door collection of properly classified waste. In addition, they play an important role in educating homes and local businesses about effective waste segregation procedures, which are essential for producing a cleaner and more sustainable environment. By prioritizing decentralized governance principles and encouraging active community engagement, the Haritha Karma Sena Women members has successfully transformed garbage management into a collective obligation that goes beyond official tasks.

This collaborative approach invites everyone in the community to participate in the program, ensuring that waste management practices is viewed as a shared responsibility that benefits all parts of society, resulting in a cleaner and healthier environment for current and future generations. The effort starts at the grassroots level, specifically in nuclear and joint families, where devoted members of the Haritha Karma Sena work with community members to teach the importance of categorizing garbage in to bio – degradable, non-biodegradable & hazardous.

Government charges Rs 50 from each house for rubbish collection, which are frequently supplemented by payments from local authorities, provide a consistent source of revenue, boosting economic empowerment.

The Haritha Karma Sena's initiatives have greatly contributed to Kerala's status as a leader in sustainable waste management practices. However, the road has not been without its hurdles. Haritha Karma Sena's initiatives on fronts logistical challenges, limited resources, and occasional resistance from communities that are hesitant to change their disposal practices. In Nutshell, Haritha Karma Sena shows a successful model of community-driven garbage management practices that other Indian states could follow.

HKS demonstrates that by combining social empowerment and environmental responsibility in sustainable garbage management. The success of this campaign emphasizes the importance of grassroots efforts in solving global environmental concerns, as the globe continues to battle with waste-related concerns; efforts like Haritha Karma Sena provide hope.

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) workers are an important part of Kerala's decentralized waste management system. Although they perform essential environmental and public health services, they are generally classified under the informal sector because their employment is not fully governed by formal labour contracts and employment protections. The concept of the informal sector was first introduced by Keith Hart (1972), referring to workers engaged in economic activities outside the formal regulatory framework. According to Bhowmik (2010) and Chen (1990), informal sector workers often face limited social security, inadequate legal protection, and unstable working conditions.

In Kerala, waste management underwent significant changes following the implementation of the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, which emphasized the responsibility of waste generators in managing waste. To strengthen decentralized waste management practices, the Government of Kerala established Haritha Karma Sena in 2017 under the Haritha Keralam Mission. The initiative functions through Kudumbashree units and operates under the supervision of local self-government institutions. Haritha Karma Sena members are primarily responsible for the collection,

segregation, and transportation of non-biodegradable waste from households and institutions to designated collection centres.

The activities of Haritha Karma Sena are coordinated and monitored by Kudumbashree, Suchitwa Mission, and Haritha Keralam Mission. As a micro-enterprise initiative, HKS provides employment opportunities, particularly for women, while contributing to environmental sustainability and public cleanliness. The collected recyclable waste is channelled through agencies such as Clean Kerala Company Limited for further processing and recycling. The income earned through waste collection services and the sale of recyclable materials serves as a major source of livelihood for HKS members.

The functioning of Haritha Karma Sena is closely associated with the state's waste management slogan, "My Waste, My Responsibility," which promotes citizen participation and accountability in waste disposal. Through house-to-house waste collection, awareness activities, and waste segregation initiatives, HKS workers play a crucial role in maintaining environmental sanitation and supporting sustainable waste management practices. Despite their valuable contribution, workers often encounter challenges such as inadequate public cooperation, occupational risks, financial insecurity, and social stigma. Nevertheless, Haritha Karma Sena remains a significant model of community-based waste management that combines environmental protection, local governance, and livelihood generation. (Ajesh antony, 2024)

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) to waste management, environmental sustainability, and the socio-economic well-being of its workers. The study explored how HKS functions as a community-based waste management initiative and assessed its role in promoting environmental protection and supporting the green economy. The findings revealed that Haritha Karma Sena plays a significant role in decentralized waste management through the collection, segregation, and disposal of waste materials. The initiative has contributed to maintaining cleanliness, reducing environmental pollution, and encouraging sustainable waste management practices at the local level.

The study further found that HKS provides employment opportunities and a source of income for its members, particularly women, thereby contributing to their economic empowerment and livelihood security. Through their participation in waste management activities, workers were able to improve their financial condition and

contribute to household expenses. The study highlighted that HKS not only supports environmental goals but also creates social and economic benefits for the community.

However, the researchers identified several challenges faced by HKS workers, including low income, health-related problems, occupational risks, inadequate safety measures, and limited welfare support. The study recommended improvements in salary structures, health insurance coverage, workplace safety, paid leave, and regular health check-ups to enhance worker welfare. The researchers concluded that while Haritha Karma Sena has made important contributions to environmental sustainability and women's empowerment, greater institutional support is required to improve the health, safety, and overall well-being of workers and ensure the long-term sustainability of the programme. (Albert Alex, 2025).

1.2 Statement of the problem

The Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) is a flagship waste management initiative by the Government of Kerala that addresses environmental challenges through community participation. These workers who are predominantly women, are instrumental in unsung proper waste collection and segregation throughout the state. Despite their crucial role, they face numerous challenges that impact their wellbeing. There is a significant income disparity among Haritha karma Sena workers. While the total workforce exceeds 36,000, nearly 4,500 workers earn less than ₹5,000 per month, making it difficult to meet basic needs. This income inequality remains a major challenge for both workers and local self-government institutions. (Anilkumar, 2023)

LSGD is currently spearheading the Malinya Muktham Nava Keralam campaign, which aims to transform Kerala into a garbage-free state. (Shainu Mohan, 2024) Due to this perception, Haritha karma Sena members may experience social stigma in the form of disrespect, avoidance, negative labeling, and lack of social recognition. Such stigma can affect their dignity, emotional well-being, family life, and social identity. Recent studies on Harithakarma Sena workers reveal several challenges in waste management and working conditions. Around 70% of households practice improper waste disposal, while 25% are reluctant to pay waste collection fees.

Studies also indicate that 72.5% of Harithakarma Sena workers face low income, 15% experience safety concerns, and 12.5% report negative behaviour from society. These challenges not only affect the efficiency of waste management services but also

influence the social and occupational experiences of workers. While previous studies have focused on public perception and the effectiveness of Haritha karma Sena in waste management, limited research has explored the lived experiences of social stigma among the members themselves. This study seeks to examine how Haritha karma Sena members experience and interpret social stigma in their work and social life despite being part of a formal waste management system. (mission, 2023)

Social stigma is a process through which individuals or groups are negatively labelled, stereotyped, and treated differently because of a particular characteristic, occupation, or social identity. According to Goffman (1963), stigma occurs when society attributes a negative identity to a person, resulting in reduced social acceptance and status. Occupational stigma is particularly common among workers engaged in occupations that are socially perceived as dirty, unpleasant, or low in status. Waste management workers often experience such stigma because their work involves direct contact with waste materials, which society commonly associates with impurity and uncleanness.

In the context of Haritha Karma Sena, social stigma may be expressed through disrespectful behaviour, negative comments, avoidance, social exclusion, and lack of recognition from community members. Workers may be labelled as "waste collectors" or "scrap collectors" in a derogatory manner, and some people may hesitate to interact closely with them because of the nature of their work. Such experiences can affect workers' dignity, self-esteem, emotional well-being, social relationships, and occupational identity. Despite playing a crucial role in maintaining environmental sanitation and public health, Haritha Karma Sena members often struggle to receive the respect and social recognition they deserve. Understanding these experiences is important because social stigma not only affects workers personally but can also influence their motivation, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life.

Despite the pivotal role played by Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) workers in Kerala's decentralized waste management system, their contributions often remain undervalued and insufficiently recognized by society. Haritha Karma Sena workers, who are predominantly women, serve as the frontline workforce responsible for the collection, segregation, and transportation of waste, thereby contributing significantly to environmental protection, public health, and sustainable waste management. Their

efforts support the objectives of the "Malinya Muktham Nava Keralam" campaign and strengthen community-based waste management practices across the state.

However, the workers continue to face numerous socio-economic and occupational challenges. One of the major issues is financial insecurity, as many workers depend on irregular user-fee collection and earn inadequate incomes that are often insufficient to meet their household needs. In addition, they are exposed to various occupational hazards, including contact with unhygienic waste materials, physical strain from waste collection activities, injuries caused by sharp objects, exposure to infections, and attacks by stray animals. The lack of adequate safety equipment, health insurance coverage, and welfare measures further increases their vulnerability.

Another significant concern is the social stigma associated with waste management work. Despite providing an essential public service, many Haritha Karma Sena workers experience negative attitudes, disrespectful behaviour, social exclusion, and occupational discrimination. Society often associates waste collection with low social status, leading to negative labelling and inadequate recognition of their contribution. Such experiences can adversely affect workers' dignity, self-esteem, social identity, and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, insufficient institutional support, inadequate infrastructure, lack of proper storage and transportation facilities, delayed payments, and limited opportunities for professional development create additional barriers to effective service delivery. These challenges not only affect the quality of life of the workers but also influence the overall efficiency and sustainability of waste management programmes.

At the same time, Haritha Karma Sena workers have brought about remarkable positive changes in local communities through improved waste segregation, increased environmental awareness, reduction of indiscriminate waste disposal, and promotion of sustainable waste management practices. Their efforts have played a crucial role in transforming local governance initiatives related to sanitation and environmental conservation.

The present study focuses on Haritha Karma Sena workers in Vengara Panchayath of Malappuram District, which has been recognized for its successful implementation of decentralized waste management practices. Vengara Panchayath was selected as the study area because it serves as an important model of effective waste management

within the district. Examining the experiences of Haritha Karma Sena workers in this context provides an opportunity to understand both the challenges they face and the positive contributions they make toward environmental sustainability and community development. The study therefore seeks to explore the socio-economic realities, occupational hardships, and social experiences of Haritha Karma Sena workers while identifying the need for policy interventions and institutional reforms that can promote worker welfare, social justice, and sustainable development. (Dr. Ramla K1, 2025)

1.3 Background of the Study

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) is a community-based waste management initiative launched by the Government of Kerala under the Suchitwa Mission to promote decentralized waste management and environmental sustainability. Consisting mainly of women members from Kudumbashree, Haritha Karma Sena workers are responsible for the collection, segregation, and transportation of non-biodegradable waste from households and institutions. Their work contributes significantly to maintaining environmental cleanliness, public health, and effective waste management across the state.

Despite their essential role, Haritha Karma Sena members often face various social and occupational challenges. Since their work involves handling waste, they are frequently subjected to negative social perceptions, disrespectful attitudes, and occupational stigma. Many workers experience negative labeling, social avoidance, and a lack of recognition despite providing an important public service. Such experiences can affect their self-esteem, dignity, social relationships, and overall well-being.

Although awareness regarding waste management and environmental protection has increased in recent years, stigma associated with waste-related occupations continues to persist in various forms. Understanding these experiences is important because social stigma not only affects the workers themselves but also influences their effectiveness, motivation, and social inclusion. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members and understand how they perceive and respond to such challenges in their daily lives.

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in understanding the important role played by Haritha Karma Sena in promoting sustainable waste management in Kerala. Through activities such as waste collection, segregation, recycling, and awareness creation, Haritha Karma Sena helps reduce environmental pollution and encourages proper waste disposal practices among households. The study also highlights how community-based waste management initiatives contribute to environmental protection, public health, and sustainable development.

Haritha Karma Sena workers play a vital role in maintaining environmental cleanliness, public health, and sustainable waste management in Kerala. Despite their significant contribution to society, many workers continue to experience social stigma, occupational discrimination, inadequate recognition, and various work-related challenges.

Such experiences not only affect their dignity and well-being but also influence their social relationships, job satisfaction, and quality of life. In this context, the present study is significant as it explores the lived experiences of social stigma among Harithakarma Sena workers and provides insights into the personal, social, and occupational realities associated with their work.

The findings of the study are expected to contribute to worker welfare, women's empowerment, social work practice, and policy development.

Women Empowerment in Society

This study highlights that although Harithakarma Sena workers experience social stigma, discrimination, and occupational challenges, their work provides them with a source of income and economic security. Financial independence has enabled many women to contribute to household expenses, support their families, and gain greater confidence in their daily lives.

The findings demonstrate that employment in Harithakarma Sena promotes women's empowerment by enhancing self-worth, economic participation, and social visibility despite the persistence of social stigma.

Harithakarma Sena

This study is significant because it brings attention to the lived experiences of Harithakarma Sena workers beyond their role in waste management. The findings reveal both the valuable contribution of workers to environmental cleanliness and the challenges they face, including stigma, improper waste segregation, delayed user-fee payments, and health concerns.

The study emphasizes the need for greater recognition, respect, and institutional support for Harithakarma Sena workers who play a crucial role in maintaining public health and environmental sustainability.

Social Work Knowledge

This study contributes to social work knowledge by providing a deeper understanding of social stigma experienced by Harithakarma Sena workers.

The findings offer insights into how stigma affects workers' social, emotional, occupational, and family lives, as well as the coping strategies they adopt. The study can help social workers develop interventions related to awareness creation, empowerment, advocacy, worker welfare, and community participation. It also contributes to future research on occupational stigma, gender, and informal sector workers.

This study is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of the social stigma experienced by Harithakarma Sena workers despite their essential contribution to environmental sustainability and public health. By exploring their lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, the study highlights the need for greater social recognition, institutional support, and worker welfare measures. The findings are expected to contribute to women's empowerment, strengthen social work knowledge and practice, and support the development of policies and interventions that promote dignity, inclusion, and social justice for Harithakarma Sena workers.

1.5 Chapterization

This research study is organized into five comprehensive chapters, each designed to systematically explore and understand the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram District. The structure of the study has been carefully planned to ensure a logical progression from the identification of the research problem to the presentation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

The first chapter, Introduction, provides the background and context of the study. It discusses the importance of Haritha Karma Sena in decentralized waste management and highlights the challenges faced by workers, particularly social stigma. The chapter includes the statement of the problem, significance of the study, objectives, research questions, key concepts, and chapterization.

The second chapter, Review of Literature, presents a review of relevant national and international studies related to Haritha Karma Sena, waste management, occupational stigma, public perception, socio-economic conditions of waste workers, and community participation. The chapter also identifies the research gap and establishes the need for the present study.

The third chapter, Methodology, explains the research design, study area, participants, sampling strategy, data collection methods, sources of data, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations adopted for the study. It describes how the research was conducted to explore the lived experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members.

The fourth chapter, Findings and Analysis, presents the socio-demographic profile of the participants, case descriptions, and thematic analysis of the data collected through interviews and observations. The chapter examines the forms of social stigma experienced by the participants, community attitudes, occupational challenges, emotional and social impacts, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of dignity and recognition.

The fifth chapter, Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations, provides a summary of the major findings of the study and draws conclusions based on the research objectives. It also offers recommendations for policy, practice, and future research to improve the well-being, recognition, and social acceptance of Haritha Karma Sena workers.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

A review of literature is an essential component of any research study as it provides a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge related to the research topic. It helps the researcher identify key concepts, theoretical perspectives, findings of previous studies, and gaps in the existing literature. Reviewing relevant studies enables the researcher to understand the current state of knowledge, avoid duplication of work, and establish a strong foundation for the present study.

The present study focuses on the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram District. Haritha Karma Sena workers play a vital role in waste management, environmental sustainability, and public health. However, despite their significant contribution, they often face various challenges, including social stigma, occupational hazards, low social recognition, and socio-economic difficulties. Therefore, it is important to examine previous studies related to Haritha Karma Sena, waste management, public perception, occupational stigma, and the socio-economic conditions of waste workers.

This chapter reviews relevant national and international studies that provide insights into the role of Haritha Karma Sena in waste management, public attitudes towards waste workers, occupational challenges, social stigma, and worker welfare. The review also helps identify the research gap and justifies the need for the present study on the lived experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members

2.1.1 Role of Haritha Karma Sena in Sustainable Waste Management and Community Empowerment.

Haritha Karma Sena plays a vital role in sustainable waste management by promoting waste segregation, collection, recycling, and proper disposal of waste. Through their activities, they help reduce environmental pollution and improve public health. At the same time, the initiative empowers community members, especially women, by providing employment opportunities, financial independence, and active participation in local development and environmental conservation.

Dr. Sajeesh Kumar B. (2025) conducted a study titled “Empowering Communities Development through Waste Management Practices: A Case Study of Haritha Karma Sena in Kerala.” The study focuses on the role of Haritha Karma Sena in improving waste management practices in Kerala. The main objective of the study is to understand

how HKS contributes to environmental protection, economic development, and social empowerment. The study examines how Haritha Karma Sena works as a community-based initiative by involving local people in waste segregation, collection, recycling, and awareness activities. It also tries to understand how these activities help in reducing landfill waste and improving cleanliness in society.

The findings of the study show that Haritha Karma Sena has played an important role in decentralizing waste management. It has helped in reducing waste, conserving resources, and lowering carbon emissions. The study also highlights that HKS has created employment opportunities, especially for women and marginalized groups. Women workers have gained confidence, leadership skills, and social recognition through their involvement.

The study concludes that Haritha Karma Sena is an effective and sustainable model for waste management. It not only improves environmental conditions but also supports economic growth and social empowerment. The study suggests that this model can be adopted in other regions as well.

Haritha Kerala Mission (2023) conducted an evaluation study titled “*Evaluation of Haritha Karma Sena Operations in Kerala.*” The study aimed to assess the performance, achievements, and challenges of Haritha Karma Sena units functioning across different local self-government institutions in Kerala. The evaluation was carried out through administrative reviews, field assessments, and monitoring reports collected from multiple districts. The findings indicated that Haritha Karma Sena has become an integral component of Kerala’s decentralized waste management system. Through door-to-door collection, source-level waste segregation, and awareness campaigns, workers have significantly contributed to improving environmental sanitation and reducing unmanaged waste. The study also highlighted the role of Haritha Karma Sena in promoting community participation and environmental responsibility among citizens. Furthermore, the programme has created livelihood opportunities, especially for women from economically weaker sections. Despite these achievements, the study noted challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, delayed payments, and limited social recognition. The report concluded that strengthening institutional support and worker welfare measures is essential for sustaining the effectiveness of Haritha Karma Sena.

Albert Alex and Dr. R. Saritha (2025) conducted a study titled “Empowering Green Warriors: Assessing the Impact of Haritha Karma Sena on Health and Economic Stability in Nilambur Block Panchayat.” The main objective of the study was to examine the health conditions, economic stability, and job satisfaction of Haritha Karma Sena workers, particularly women engaged in waste management activities. The study adopted a mixed-method approach using quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews among Haritha Karma Sena members in Nilambur Block Panchayat, Malappuram district. The findings revealed that many workers experienced respiratory problems, back pain, physical exhaustion, and stress due to their occupation. The study also found that job satisfaction was closely linked to health conditions, workplace safety, and financial stability. Although Haritha Karma Sena provided employment opportunities and some degree of economic security, many workers considered their income insufficient. The study concluded that improved health and safety measures, training opportunities, and financial benefits are necessary to enhance the well-being of workers. (Albert Alex, 2025)

2.1.2 Stigmatisation

Stigmatization refers to the process by which individuals or groups are negatively labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, or treated unfairly because of a particular characteristic, identity, or occupation that society considers undesirable or inferior. In the context of Haritha Karma Sena workers, stigmatization occurs when workers are viewed negatively because they are involved in waste collection and management. This may include disrespectful behaviour, social avoidance, negative comments, being labelled as "waste collectors" in a derogatory manner, and lack of social recognition. Such experiences can affect their dignity, self-esteem, social identity, and overall well-being.

Dijker and Koomen (2003) authored the book “Stigmatization, Tolerance and Repair: An Integrative Psychological Analysis of Responses to Deviance.” The primary objective of the book was to examine the psychological mechanisms underlying stigmatization, discrimination, tolerance, and social responses toward individuals or groups perceived as different or deviant from societal norms. The authors sought to provide an integrated theoretical framework for understanding how social stigma develops and how it influences interpersonal and group relationships.

The book employed a comprehensive review and synthesis of psychological theories and empirical studies related to stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and social identity. The authors analyzed how individuals form negative attitudes toward certain social groups and occupations, particularly those associated with behaviours, characteristics, or activities that society considers undesirable, unpleasant, or inferior.

The findings revealed that stigmatization often arises when individuals or groups are perceived as violating social expectations or engaging in activities that evoke feelings of disgust, fear, or discomfort. The authors explained that occupations involving direct contact with waste, sanitation, or other forms of “dirty work” are particularly vulnerable to social stigmatization because society frequently associates such work with impurity and low social status. The study further highlighted that stigma can result in social exclusion, discrimination, reduced self-esteem, and limited opportunities for social participation among affected individuals.

The authors emphasized that tolerance and social acceptance can be promoted through education, positive social interaction, awareness programmes, and increased understanding of the valuable contributions made by stigmatized groups. The book concluded that reducing stigma requires both individual attitude change and broader social interventions aimed at challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusion.

This work is highly relevant to the present study because it provides a psychological explanation for the social stigma experienced by Haritha Karma Sena workers. The concepts discussed by Dijker and Koomen help explain why waste management workers may encounter negative attitudes, social avoidance, and discrimination despite their significant contribution to environmental sanitation and public health.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) conducted a study titled “*How Can You Do It? Dirty Work and the Challenge of Constructing a Positive Identity.*” The primary objective of the study was to examine how individuals working in socially tainted or stigmatized occupations develop and maintain a positive self-identity despite negative societal perceptions. The study focused on occupations commonly referred to as “dirty work,” including jobs associated with physical dirt, social stigma, or moral disapproval. The researchers employed a conceptual and theoretical analysis based on existing literature related to occupational identity, stigma, and organizational behavior.

The findings revealed that workers engaged in stigmatized occupations often experience negative stereotypes and social devaluation from society. However, rather than accepting these negative labels, workers actively develop coping mechanisms to preserve their self-esteem and occupational identity. These strategies include reframing their work as socially valuable, emphasizing the importance of their contribution to society, creating strong group solidarity among coworkers, and challenging negative societal perceptions. The study found that workers derive pride and meaning from their occupations by focusing on the benefits their work provides to the community.

The researchers concluded that occupational stigma does not necessarily result in a negative self-concept. Through collective identity formation and positive meaning-making, workers can construct a sense of dignity and pride in their work despite societal prejudice. The study emphasized the importance of recognizing the value of occupations that are often overlooked or stigmatized by society.

This study is highly relevant to the present research because Haritha Karma Sena workers are engaged in waste management activities that may be perceived as “dirty work” by society. The study helps explain how workers cope with occupational stigma and maintain a positive occupational identity despite experiencing social discrimination and lack of recognition.

Erving Goffman (1963) authored the influential book *“Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.”* The primary objective of the book was to examine how society labels certain individuals, groups, and occupations as socially undesirable and how these labels affect their identities, social interactions, and opportunities. Goffman developed a sociological framework for understanding stigma and its impact on people's everyday lives. The book is based on theoretical analysis and observations of various stigmatized groups within society.

The findings revealed that stigma arises when an individual possesses an attribute, characteristic, or social identity that is negatively perceived by society. Such individuals are often viewed as different, inferior, or undesirable, leading to discrimination, exclusion, and social rejection. Goffman argued that stigma is not inherent in a person or occupation but is socially constructed through societal attitudes and cultural beliefs. The book further explained that stigmatized individuals often experience reduced social status, damaged self-image, and difficulties in forming social relationships. To cope

with stigma, individuals may develop strategies to manage their identity and navigate social interactions.

The study concluded that stigma is a powerful social process that influences how individuals are perceived and treated within society. Goffman emphasized that social attitudes play a crucial role in creating and maintaining stigma and that reducing stigma requires changes in societal perceptions and interactions.

This work is highly relevant to the present study because it provides the foundational theoretical framework for understanding the social stigma experienced by Haritha Karma Sena workers. The theory helps explain how waste management workers may be labeled, stereotyped, and socially marginalized despite their important contribution to environmental sanitation and public health.

2.1.3 Social stigma and worker shortage in Haritha karma sena

As a result of this stigma, along with low income and difficult working conditions, many people are reluctant to join Haritha Karma Sena. This has contributed to worker shortages in several local self-government institutions, affecting the efficiency and sustainability of waste management services. Therefore, reducing social stigma and improving recognition and support for workers are essential to attracting and retaining Haritha Karma Sena members.

Anilkumar T (2023) reported in a news article titled “*Social stigma: Local bodies in Kerala labour to enlist HKS staff*” about the issues faced by Haritha Karma Sena workers in Kerala. The main focus of the article is to understand how social stigma affects the recruitment and working conditions of HKS workers. The article explains that Haritha Karma Sena workers, mostly women, are responsible for collecting non-biodegradable waste from households. However, due to the nature of their work, they are often labelled as “waste collectors,” which creates a negative social image. This has discouraged many women from joining the workforce.

The report highlights that many local bodies in Kerala are facing a shortage of nearly 30–40% of HKS workers. The stigma attached to the job, along with low income, has reduced the willingness of people to take up this work. Existing workers also feel demotivated due to lack of respect and recognition.

The article concludes that there is a need to reduce social stigma through awareness and to improve working conditions by providing better wages, safety equipment, and support from local authorities. (Anilkumar, 2023)

2.1.4 Challenges and socio-economic conditions of Haritha Karma Sena workers

Haritha Karma Sena workers, who are predominantly women from economically weaker sections, play a vital role in waste management and environmental sustainability. However, they face several socio-economic and occupational challenges. Many workers earn low and irregular incomes, making it difficult to meet their household needs. They are also exposed to health risks, physical strain, and unsafe working conditions due to continuous contact with waste materials.

Dr. Ramla K and Dr. Noushad Chengodan (2025) conducted a study titled “*Recent Trends and Challenges on the Green Frontline: Haritha Karma Sena Workers – A Case Study of Vengara Panchayath in Malappuram District.*” The main objective of the study was to understand the working conditions, socio-economic status, and challenges faced by Haritha Karma Sena workers. The study also aimed to examine issues related to income, safety, and recognition of the workers.

The researchers used a descriptive case study method. Primary data were collected from 30 Haritha Karma Sena workers using a questionnaire. The study area was Vengara Panchayath in Malappuram district. The findings of the study show that most of the workers are women and belong to economically weaker sections. Many workers earn a low income and depend on this work for their livelihood. The study also found that workers face several problems such as unsafe working conditions, lack of proper safety measures, irregular income, and low social recognition. Even though they play an important role in waste management, their contribution is not properly valued. The study concludes that there is a need to improve wages, ensure better safety measures, and increase awareness in the community about the importance of Haritha Karma Sena worker. (Dr. Ramla K1, 2025)

2.1.5 Health and economic impact of Haritha karma sena workers

Albert Alex and Dr. R. Saritha (2025) conducted a study titled “*Empowering Green Warriors: Assessing the Impact of Haritha Karma Sena on Health and Economic Stability in Nilambur Block Panchayat.*” The main objective of the study was to

examine the health conditions, economic stability, and job satisfaction of Haritha Karma Sena workers, especially women.

The study used a mixed-method approach, including both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The data were collected from Haritha Karma Sena members in Nilambur Block Panchayat, Malappuram district. The findings of the study show that many workers face health problems such as respiratory issues, back pain, and stress due to the nature of their work. The study also found that job satisfaction is closely related to health, safety, and working conditions. In terms of economic status, Haritha Karma Sena provides some financial stability, but the income is still not sufficient for many workers.

The study concludes that while Haritha Karma Sena supports economic stability and provides employment, there is a need to improve health and safety measures, provide better training, and increase financial benefits for workers. **Keywords:** Haritha Karma Sena, waste management, health and safety, economic stability, job satisfaction, sustainability. (Albert Alex, 2025).

2.1.6 Community-based waste management through Haritha Karma Sena

AJesh Antony, Sreyalakshmi Kesavan, and Dr. Paul Jose P (2024) conducted a study titled “Community-Driven Approaches to Waste Management: Insights from the Haritha Karma Sena Initiative in Kerala.” The main objective of the study was to examine the role of Haritha Karma Sena in improving household waste management and promoting community participation. The study used a descriptive research design. Primary data were collected from 100 households in Kodakara Panchayat, Thrissur district, using structured questionnaires. Secondary data were also used, and statistical tools like chi-square test and ranking method were applied. The findings show that there is high awareness about Haritha Karma Sena among the public. Waste collection, segregation, and recycling practices have improved due to HKS activities. The study also found that the efficiency and positive attitude of workers increase public satisfaction. However, issues like communication and fee structure need improvement.

The study concludes that Haritha Karma Sena is an effective community-based model for waste management and helps in achieving a clean environment. (Ajesh antony, 2024)

Kaza et al. (2018) conducted a study titled “*What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050*.” The primary objective of the study was to examine global waste generation trends, waste management practices, and the challenges faced by waste workers across different countries. The study was published by the World Bank and adopted a comparative analytical approach using data collected from countries representing different income groups and regions. The researchers analyzed waste generation patterns, collection systems, disposal methods, recycling practices, and the socio-economic conditions of waste workers.

The findings revealed that waste workers play a crucial role in maintaining environmental sustainability and supporting recycling systems. However, despite their significant contribution, many waste workers experience poor working conditions, occupational hazards, low wages, social exclusion, and limited access to social protection measures. The study highlighted that waste workers are frequently exposed to health risks such as respiratory diseases, injuries, infections, and long-term occupational illnesses due to continuous contact with waste materials. In many developing countries, waste workers also face discrimination and occupational stigma because their work is associated with dirt, pollution, and low social status.

The study further emphasized that the growing volume of waste generated worldwide makes the role of waste workers increasingly important for sustainable development. The researchers argued that integrating waste workers into formal waste management systems, ensuring occupational safety, providing social security benefits, and recognizing their environmental contribution are essential for achieving effective and sustainable waste management. The study concluded that waste workers should be viewed as environmental service providers rather than marginalized labourers. This study is highly relevant to the present research because it provides global evidence regarding the occupational stigma, social exclusion, and workplace challenges experienced by waste workers, which are also reflected in the experiences of Haritha Karma Sena workers in Kerala.

Sudmant, A. (2020)⁴ conducted a research paper titled “Reduced Waste and Improved Livelihoods for All: Lessons on Waste Management from Ahmedabad, India,” investigating how waste management initiatives have improved livelihoods in Ahmedabad. Using qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus group

discussions, the research found that these waste management efforts have enhanced economic stability for workers in the sector. Nevertheless, it lacks a thorough exploration of health outcomes for waste management workers, indicating an area for further research.

Recommendations contain increased community engagement and improved safety measures for waste workers. This research provides insights into the potential for waste management programs to enhance economic stability, which keeps this research investigation of HKS's role in improving health and economic conditions for its members. (Sudmant, 2024)

2.1.7 Role of Haritha Karma Sena in Waste Management

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) plays a crucial role in Kerala's decentralized waste management system. The members are responsible for door-to-door collection, segregation, and transportation of non-biodegradable waste from households and institutions.

They promote proper waste disposal practices, encourage waste segregation at source, and support recycling activities. Through regular awareness campaigns and community interaction, HKS helps reduce environmental pollution, improve public health, and maintain cleanliness in local communities. Their efforts contribute significantly to sustainable waste management and the achievement of a cleaner and healthier environment.

Shameerdas, T., & Sandhya, S. B. (2021)¹ conducted a research paper titled “Role of Haritha Karma Sena in Waste Management and Green Economy.” This research investigates the important role of Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) in enabling sustainable waste management and its assistance to the green economy in Kerala. Employing a descriptive and analytical research design, the research collected primary data through structured questionnaires to evaluate the environmental impact of HKS activities.

The results indicate that HKS reduces improper waste treatment, thereby enhancing environmental quality. Despite these accomplishments, the research recognizes a research gap concerning the health outcomes and economic stability of HKS members. The authors recommend increased training for HKS workers and efforts to raise public awareness about sustainable waste practices. This research delivers a foundational understanding of the environmental and economic impacts of HKS, which aligns with

the recent research objectives focused on assessing HKS members' health and economic stability.

2.1.8 PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Nair and Prakash (2022) conducted a study titled “*Public Perception towards Haritha Karma Sena Workers in Kerala.*” The main objective of the study was to examine community attitudes and perceptions toward Haritha Karma Sena workers and to understand how these perceptions influence the social status and occupational experiences of workers. The researchers employed a mixed-method research design that combined quantitative household surveys with qualitative focus group discussions conducted among residents in selected local self-government institutions in Kerala.

The findings revealed that most residents recognized the importance of Haritha Karma Sena workers in maintaining cleanliness, managing household waste, and promoting environmental sustainability. Many respondents appreciated the regular waste collection services and acknowledged the contribution of workers toward improving public health and sanitation. However, despite this appreciation, a considerable number of community members continued to perceive waste management work as a low-status occupation. Waste-related work was often associated with dirt, unpleasantness, and social inferiority, resulting in negative attitudes toward the workers themselves.

The study further found that this contradiction between service appreciation and worker recognition created a significant challenge for Haritha Karma Sena members. Many workers reported experiencing disrespectful behaviour, social avoidance, and inadequate recognition from sections of the community. Such negative perceptions affected workers' self-esteem, occupational identity, and overall job satisfaction. The study also suggested that occupational stigma contributed to difficulties in attracting and retaining workers, thereby creating workforce shortages in certain areas.

The researchers concluded that public awareness campaigns, community education programmes, and initiatives promoting the dignity of labour are necessary to transform societal attitudes toward waste workers. Strengthening public understanding of the environmental and social importance of Haritha Karma Sena can help reduce stigma and improve social acceptance. This study is particularly relevant to the present research because it directly addresses the issue of social stigma experienced by Haritha

Karma Sena workers and highlights the role of public perception in shaping their occupational experiences.

2.1.9 Environmental impact

Nyanza, Reddy, Ngayaga, Nkrumah, Hossein, Ramadhani, Ripanda, and Sahini (2026), in their chapter *Economic, Social, and Environmental Impact of Waste Management*, examined the multidimensional impacts of waste management on economic development, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. The authors argue that waste management extends beyond sanitation and serves as an important mechanism for promoting resource efficiency, community empowerment, and sustainable development. They highlight that effective waste management systems can generate green employment opportunities, improve public health, and support environmental conservation through recycling and resource recovery practices.

From a social perspective, the study emphasizes the contribution of waste workers while also drawing attention to the challenges they face, including occupational risks, social exclusion, marginalization, and inadequate recognition. The authors note that waste workers often experience poor working conditions and social discrimination despite their significant contribution to environmental sustainability and public welfare. These challenges affect their social status, well-being, and quality of life.

The chapter further discusses the environmental benefits of proper waste management, such as reducing pollution, conserving resources, mitigating climate change, and promoting sustainable cities and communities. It highlights the importance of integrating waste management with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to sanitation, decent work, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate action, and partnerships for development.

The authors advocate for inclusive waste governance that recognizes the contribution of waste workers and promotes their social and economic well-being. They recommend strengthening institutional support, encouraging community participation, and adopting innovative technologies to improve waste management systems. The study concludes that sustainable and inclusive waste management can contribute to environmental protection while enhancing the livelihoods and social recognition of waste workers.

This study is relevant to the present research as it highlights the social challenges, marginalization, and recognition issues faced by waste workers, which are closely

related to the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Kerala.

Thomas, J., & Abraham, S. (2022)³ executed a research paper titled “Haritha Karma Sena: Transforming Waste Management,” focusing on the waste management techniques employed by HKS and their environmental impact. This research used a case study approach and gathered qualitative data from HKS members and local communities. The research found that HKS’s initiatives have significantly improved waste management practices and encouraged community engagement in environmental conservation. However, the paper highlights a gap in a detailed analysis of the economic and health benefits for HKS members. The authors advise expanding community outreach programs and enhancing waste segregation practices. This research evaluation of HKS’s significance aligns with this research paper's emphasis on understanding the improvements in health and economic stability for HKS members.

2.2 RESEARCH GAP ANALYSIS

A review of the existing literature reveals that several studies have examined the role of Haritha Karma Sena in waste management, environmental sustainability, public perception, and the socio-economic conditions of workers. For example, Shameerdas and Sandhya (2021) focused on the contribution of Haritha Karma Sena to sustainable waste management and the green economy, while **Thomas and Abraham (2022)** examined its environmental impact. Similarly, **Nair and Kumar (2021)** explored public perceptions regarding Haritha Karma Sena and highlighted community attitudes toward waste management services.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into waste management practices, environmental outcomes, public perception, and occupational challenges, they do not adequately explore the lived experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena workers. Most studies discuss community attitudes from the perspective of the public rather than from the workers themselves. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding how negative labelling, discrimination, social avoidance, disrespectful behaviour, and occupational stigma affect the personal, social, emotional, and psychological well-being of Haritha Karma Sena members.

The study by Nair and Prakash (2022) identified that waste management workers are often viewed as belonging to a low-status occupation and may experience social exclusion. The study primarily focused on public perception and did not provide an in-depth qualitative exploration of workers' own experiences of stigma and the coping mechanisms they adopt in their daily lives. A significant research gap exists in understanding the lived experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members, particularly in the context of Thiruvananthapuram District. The present study seeks to address this gap by exploring the forms of stigma experienced by workers, the influence of gender on stigma, the social and psychological effects of occupational stigma, and the strategies adopted by workers to cope with such experiences.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Methodology is a systematic process used to collect, analyse, and interpret data in order to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of a study. It provides the framework that guides the researcher in conducting the investigation in a scientific and organized manner. This chapter describes the research design, study area, participants, sampling strategy, data collection methods, sources of data, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations adopted for the study. The methodology was designed to explore and understand the lived experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram District and to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings.

3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY

Experiences of social stigma among Haritha karma sena members in Thiruvananthapuram.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.3.1 General questions

- How do Haritha karma Sena members experience and interpret social stigma in their work and social life despite being part of a formal waste management system?

3.3.2 Specific questions

- What forms of social stigma do Haritha karma Sena members experience in their daily work, and how are these reflected in community attitudes and behaviours?
- How does gender influence the nature and intensity of social stigma experienced by Haritha karma Sena members?
- What are the social, emotional, and psychological effects of occupational stigma on the personal and family lives of Haritha karma Sena members?
- Do Haritha Karma Sena members feel that their work is recognized and appreciated by society?

- What are the major challenges faced by Haritha karma Sena members in their work and social life?”
- How do Haritha karma Sena members perceive the role of formal recognition in reducing stigma, and how do they cope with stigmatizing experiences?

3.4 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

3.4.1 EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL STIGMA

- **Conceptual definition**

social stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" which reduces an individual from a whole and accepted person to a tainted and discounted one. Stigma occurs when society negatively labels individuals or groups based on certain characteristics, identities, or occupations, leading to prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion. (Goffman, 1963)

- **Operational definition**

In the context of this study, the term social stigma refers to the negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviour directed toward members of the Haritha Karma Sena because of their involvement in waste collection and sanitation work. Due to the nature of their occupation, they may experience disrespectful behaviour, social avoidance, or be viewed as doing inferior or unclean work by some members of the community.

3.4.2 HARITHA KARMA SENA

Conceptual Definition

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) is a state-supported workforce initiative under the Suchitwa Mission, Government of Kerala, formed to promote decentralized waste management. It consists of trained workers mainly women and members from marginalized communities who are responsible for the door-to-door collection, segregation, and management of biodegradable and non-biodegradable solid waste at the Local Self Government level. “(Kerala State Pollution Control Board, 2020)”

Operational Definition

For this study, Harithakarma Sena members are defined as the individuals officially engaged and deployed by local self-government institutions in Thiruvananthapuram district as part of the Suchitwa Mission's decentralized waste management initiative, who are responsible for the collection, segregation, and transportation of household solid waste.

3.4.3 INFLUENCE

Conceptual Definition

According to Ridgeway (2011), gender influence refers to the effect of socially constructed gender roles and expectations on individuals' experiences, opportunities, and social interactions. (Ridgeway, 2011)

Operational Definition

In the present study, gender influence refers to the ways in which being a woman affects the experiences of Haritha karma Sena workers, including exposure to stigma, workplace challenges, safety concerns, social attitudes, and opportunities for empowerment.

3.4.4 FORMAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

Conceptual Definition

Formal waste management refers to organized and legally recognized systems for waste collection, segregation, transportation, recycling, treatment, and disposal carried out by authorized agencies or institutions. – (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2015)

Operational Definition

In the present study, formal waste management refers to the waste collection, segregation, and disposal activities performed by Harithakarma Sena workers under the supervision of local self-government institutions in Thiruvananthapuram District.

3.5 PILOT STUDY

In the pilot study conducted, the researcher aimed to evaluate the feasibility, time, cost, adverse events, and effect size of the research project on Experiences of social stigma among Haritha karma sena members in Thiruvananthapuram. The purpose of this preliminary study was to assess the practicality and viability of the research before conducting a full-scale investigation.

As part of the research, a pilot study was conducted. An interview was carried out with MRS L a member of the Haritha Karma Sena. She was contacted over the phone and the interview was conducted at a convenient time. The interview helped the researcher gain a basic understanding of the work and responsibilities of Haritha Karma Sena members and the nature of their services in waste management.

3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adopted a **qualitative multiple case study research design** to explore the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram District. A multiple case study design involves the detailed examination of several cases to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon within its real-life context.

This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand the lived experiences, perceptions, feelings, and social realities of Haritha Karma Sena members regarding social stigma. Each participant was treated as an individual case, allowing the researcher to examine similarities and differences in their experiences across different social and geographical settings, including rural, urban, and coastal areas.

3.7 RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPATION

The study was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. The district was selected because Haritha Karma Sena members play a significant role in implementing decentralized waste management activities in both urban and rural areas. Thiruvananthapuram has an active Haritha Karma Sena network involved in the collection, segregation, and transportation of non-biodegradable waste. The district also provides diverse socio-cultural and occupational contexts that enable a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members.

3.8 PARTICIPATION

The participants of the study consisted of Haritha Karma Sena members working in different areas of Thiruvananthapuram District. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience and involvement in waste management activities. The researcher intentionally selected participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding their experiences of social stigma, occupational challenges, community interactions, and coping mechanisms.

A total of eight Haritha Karma Sena members participated in the study. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, that is, when no new themes or significant information emerged from subsequent interviews. The participants represented different backgrounds and work settings, enabling the researcher to obtain diverse perspectives on the phenomenon under study. Their narratives provided valuable insights into the social, emotional, and occupational experiences associated with their work as Haritha Karma Sena members.

3.9 SAMPLE STRATEGY

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to identify and select Haritha Karma Sena members who had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation and could provide rich and meaningful information relevant to the study objectives.

The participants were selected for individual face-to-face guided interviews based on specific inclusion criteria. These criteria included active involvement as a Haritha Karma Sena member, experience in waste collection and management activities, willingness to participate in the study, and the ability to share their experiences regarding social stigma and occupational challenges. The participants were chosen from different areas of Thiruvananthapuram District to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences.

Data collection continued until saturation was achieved, that is, when no new themes or significant information emerged from the interviews. A total of eight Haritha Karma Sena members participated in the study and provided valuable insights into their lived experiences of social stigma, community interactions, and work-related challenges.

3.10 SAMPLE SIZE

For the present study, a total sample of 8 Haritha karma sena members in Thiruvananthapuram, who were satisfying the exclusion and inclusion criteria were selected.

3.11 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher collected data from 8 Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram district. The researcher personally visited rural, urban, and coastal areas and conducted face-to-face interactions using an interview guide. The interviews conducted in Malayalam were later transcribed into English for analysis and interpretation.

3.12 SOURCE OF DATA

The study utilized multiple sources of data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members.

Observation: The researcher employed non-participant observation to understand the working environment, interactions with community members, waste collection practices, and the overall occupational context of Haritha Karma Sena workers. The researcher observed the activities without directly participating in them.

Interviews: Face-to-face, one-to-one in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants. A guided interview schedule was used to explore their experiences, perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies related to social stigma and their work.

Documents: Relevant documents such as government reports, policy guidelines, operational manuals, previous research studies, and records related to Haritha Karma Sena were reviewed to obtain supporting information and contextual understanding of the study.

Audiovisual Materials: Audiovisual materials, including photographs and audio recordings, were used as supplementary sources of data. Photographs helped document the work environment and activities of Haritha Karma Sena members, while audio recordings of interviews facilitated accurate transcription and analysis of participants' narratives.

3.13 PRE – TEST

As part of the research process, the researcher conducted a pre-test to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of the interview schedule. The pre-test involved three participants who were selected based on their relevance to the study. The guided interview schedule, which was carefully prepared by the researcher, served as a structured framework for conducting the interviews.

During the pre-test, the researcher interviewed the two participants individually, following the guided interview schedule. The purpose of the pre-test was to

assess the clarity and comprehensiveness of the interview questions, as well as to identify any potential issues or areas for improvement. The participants' responses were carefully recorded and analysed to determine the relevance and effectiveness of the interview schedule.

3.14 DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, the data collected through in-depth interviews undergoes a thorough process of analysis with the primary objective of gaining an understanding of the research concerns from the perspective of the participants. The qualitative case studies were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The data analysis process involved exploring various lines of inquiry to generate concepts, identify patterns within the emerging concepts, understand the emergence of these concepts, and provide explanations for their relevance. The analysis was guided by the research questions that guided the study. These research questions served as a framework for organizing and interpreting the collected data.

3.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in research refer to the norms or guidelines that help researchers distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable practices during the research process. Prior permission was obtained from the Head of the Department of Social Work to conduct the data collection.

Verbal consent was obtained from all the participants before conducting the interviews. They were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this study.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

Data analysis and interpretation constitute a crucial stage in qualitative research, as they facilitate the systematic examination and understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings related to the phenomenon under study. The primary objective of data analysis is to organize, interpret, and derive meaningful insights from the information collected during the research process. In the present study, data analysis was carried out to explore and understand the lived experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members in Thiruvananthapuram District. The study adopted thematic analysis as the method of data analysis.

The data were collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with Haritha Karma Sena members. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The researcher repeatedly read and reviewed the interview transcripts to become familiar with the content and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. After familiarization with the data, the researcher systematically identified significant statements, recurring ideas, and meaningful patterns related to social stigma, occupational experiences, community interactions, and coping mechanisms. These responses were coded and grouped according to their similarities and relevance. The codes were then organized into broader categories, which were further developed into themes and sub-themes that reflected the essence of the participants' lived experiences. The interpretation of the data was carried out by examining the meanings embedded within the participants' narratives and relating them to the objectives of the study. Attention was given not only to what the participants expressed but also to how they interpreted and made sense of their experiences.

The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of major themes and sub-themes that collectively explain the experiences of social stigma among Haritha Karma Sena members. These themes form the basis of the findings and interpretation presented in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.2 Socio demographic profile

1. Mrs. K is a 50-year-old married woman from an urban area who has completed Plus Two education. She has 23 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹24,000.
2. Mrs. C is a 37-year-old married woman from an urban area who has completed 10th standard education. She has 3 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹24,000.
3. Mrs. S is a 42-year-old married woman from an urban area who has completed 10th standard education. She has 2 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹24,000.
4. Mrs. J is a 50-year-old separated woman from a coastal area who has completed 10th standard education. She has 3 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹9,000.
5. Mrs. N is a 45-year-old married woman from a coastal area who has completed 10th standard education. She has 3 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹5,000.
6. Mrs. U is a 50-year-old married woman from a coastal area who has completed 8th standard education. She has 5 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹5,000.
7. Mrs. A is a 51-year-old married woman from a coastal area who studied up to 4th standard. She has 4 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹5,000.
8. Mrs. H is a 50-year-old widow from a rural area who has completed 10th standard education. She has 10 years of experience in Haritha karma Sena and earns a monthly income of ₹9,000.

4.3 CASE PRESENTATION

4.3.1 RESPONDENT ONE

Mrs. K, a 50-year-old woman from an urban area, has been working in the Haritha karma Sena for the past 23 years. Her monthly household income of ₹24,000. She has long experience in waste management work and has witnessed significant changes in community attitudes over time.

Regarding social stigma, *Mrs. K explained that there has been a clear improvement in how people treat her. She stated,*

“Now people treat us in a good way. They show respect when they see us. Earlier, this kind of respect was not there.”

This shows a transition from earlier negative attitudes to more positive social acceptance.

Although she mentioned that she has not faced major negative experiences, she pointed out that not everyone fully accepts their work. She said, “90% of people respect and accept our job. but around 10% of people still do not fully accept us.” In the beginning, the situation was more difficult, but now most people behave politely and even invite them to family functions.

In terms of daily work challenges, *Mrs. K highlighted issues related to waste segregation and user fee payment. She explained, “some households do not properly segregate waste” and “some people delay or refuse to pay the user fee... they also argue and do not segregate waste properly.”* These challenges still affect their work despite overall improvements.

Mrs. K also shared her experience about community behaviour outside work. She said, *“now the treatment is good. In the beginning, neighbours behaved very badly. But now, that kind of behaviour is not there.”* This indicates a positive change in social relationships.

As a woman worker, she acknowledged gender-related difficulties. She said, *“yes, women face more difficulties in this job, but they continue because they are working for*

the community.” She also confirmed that she has received comments because she is a woman doing this work, though she currently feels safe while going house to house.

Regarding personal life, Mrs. K expressed satisfaction and pride in her work.

She stated, “this job has not affected my personal life... I am happy with this work... not doing this only for income, but also as a service to society.”

She also connected her work with public health improvement, explaining that earlier there were many health problems due to waste dumping, but now conditions have improved.

Mrs. K believes that society mostly values their contribution,

stating, “90% of society values our work, but some still do not.” For her, dignity is closely linked to service,

as she explained that dignity means serving society and feeling proud of her job, while also expecting formal recognition and respect.

She also noted the importance of formal identity in improving social perception.

She said, “wearing a uniform and ID card changes how people treat us in a positive way.”

She further added that stigma has reduced over time due to awareness and health concerns, stating that earlier there was more discrimination, but now people invite them to programs and offer food.

In handling negative situations, Mrs. K adopts a calm approach. She said, “I do not mind and avoid arguing.”

Her motivation comes from the belief that waste management reduces health problems, and she feels proud to contribute to the community.

Regarding support, she mentioned that income is based on waste collection and not a fixed salary, and “there is no government support during health issues.” However, she acknowledged that awareness programs are conducted in the area.

Overall, Mrs. K expressed satisfaction with the positive changes. She feels that her work helps keep the surroundings clean and improves health conditions. She also noted

that the uniform and ID card have improved her dignity and recognition. She feels more valued and satisfied with her role in the community.

4.3.2 RESPONDENT TWO

Mrs. S, a 42-year-old married woman from an urban area, is working in the Harithakarma Sena. She has completed 10th standard. family with a monthly household income of ₹24,000. Through her work, she has experienced both positive and negative aspects of social attitudes.

Mrs. S shared that people generally show a positive attitude because of the service provided. She stated, “people are cooperative because their waste is being cleaned... so they have a positive attitude.”

This indicates that awareness about cleanliness has improved people’s behaviour.

However, she also reported some negative experiences. She explained,

“Some people are very judgmental and do not give plastic waste properly.” She further described a situation where “some people move away after seeing us in uniform... some behave differently when they see us.”

During waste collection, she mentioned that people are mostly polite, saying that

“people are polite because waste is no longer dumped.” At the same time, practical challenges still exist. She noted, “some households do not properly segregate waste” and “sometimes people refuse or delay giving the proper user fee.”

In terms of social relations, Mrs. S expressed that neighbours treat her equally and there is no discrimination outside her work environment. This shows a level of social acceptance in personal interactions.

From a gender perspective, she highlighted that women face more difficulties in this job. She stated, “women face more difficulty because the work is heavy... sometimes people do not value our work.” She also confirmed that she has received comments related to her work in plastic waste collection. However, she feels safe while going house to house and reported no major issues in recent years.

Regarding the impact on personal life, Mrs. S shared that her family is supportive. *She said, “there is no teasing from family members they are satisfied.” She also emphasized that stigma has not affected her confidence, stating that even if people argue, it does not affect her because she is interested in the work.*

Mrs. S believes that society now recognizes their contribution. She said, “society values us now because people are more aware.” For her, dignity is defined as “respect for our work and service to society.”

She also pointed out the role of formal recognition. She stated,

“Wearing a uniform changes how people treat us positively... but some people still move away during working time.”

She feels recognized as a government worker and believes that the initiative is beneficial for society. She added that “stigma has reduced in recent years... people value us more now, and negative attitudes have reduced.”

In dealing with negative situations, Mrs. S uses a calm coping strategy. She said, “I do not argue... I talk calmly and believe people will understand.” Her motivation comes from the belief that her work is valuable, as it improves waste management and reduces health issues.

Regarding support, she mentioned that there is limited assistance, *stating that “there is no other support except a yearly bonus of ₹1000.” However, she acknowledged that awareness programs are conducted in the community.*

Mrs. S also shared a positive change in her life after joining Haritha karma Sena. She explained that earlier she worked in sales and felt stressed, but now she feels satisfied as “this job is service to society and an important work for community development.

4.3.3 RESPONDENT THREE

Mrs. C is a 37-year-old married woman living in a coastal area. She has studied up to 10th standard and has been working in Harithakarma Sena for the past 5 years. Her monthly income is around ₹24,000, and she is also contributing to her family through this work.

While explaining about community behaviour, she said that “now the response from the community is good... people offer food and water and sometimes call us to collect plastic waste.” She also shared that earlier the situation was different, as “people used to move away when they saw us in the community... but now that situation has changed.” This shows that there is a clear positive change in people’s attitude.

At the same time, she mentioned that not everyone shows respect. She said that “some people still do not respect us... those people do not give plastic waste or pay the user fee.” She also feels that lack of awareness is one reason for this behaviour.

Mrs. C said that she has not faced any major negative incident, and now most people behave politely. She explained that “many households keep the plastic ready before we arrive.”

However, there are still some practical problems in her work.

She said that “most households do not segregate plastic waste... they usually give mixed plastic without separating it.” She also mentioned that “some people still delay paying the user fee... those who live alone sometimes do not allow waste collection and also refuse to pay the fee.”

In her personal life, she said neighbours treat her well and there is no issue. She also said that “this job has not affected my personal or social life... I am comfortable doing this work.”

Regarding gender, she shared a different opinion.

“There is no difference and women do not face additional difficulty in my experience.” But she also mentioned that she has received some negative comments. She said that “some people call us in a disrespectful way like ‘waste picker’ or ‘the person who collects waste.’”

Emotionally, such comments sometimes affect her. She said “*sometimes comments from people make me feel sad... but since I like this job, I do not mind such comments now.*” She also clearly said that stigma has not affected her confidence and she continues the job confidently.

She believes that society has started valuing their work. She said “people now understand that waste causes problems... and more households are paying user fees.”

For her, dignity means “doing the job with self-respect and receiving respect from others.” She believes every job has value.

She also explained that uniform and ID card bring respect. She said “people show more respect when we wear them... many people now see us as government workers.” She also said that “now there is a good change... people’s mindset has changed... many households call us to give plastic... we now get some respect.”

When facing disrespect, *she said “whatever people say, we do not respond back.” Her motivation comes from the idea that “we are doing this for the good of society... it can reduce many health problems.”*

Regarding support, she said “there is very little help from the government... support is only given in serious situations like long hospital stays.” However, she mentioned that awareness classes are conducted regularly.

Finally, she shared the positive impact of this job in her life. She said “it became a source of income... it helped me become financially independent... I can help my husband.” She also feels proud that her work brings change in society and helps reduce health problems.

4.3.4 RESPONDENT FOUR

MRS J is a 50-year-old woman from a coastal area. She is separated and has studied up to 10th standard. She has been working in Harithakarma Sena for the past 3 years. Her monthly income is around ₹9000, and she depends on this work for her livelihood.

When she spoke about her experience, she said that earlier the situation was very difficult. She said, *“in the past, the community did not accept us... people used to scold Harithakarma Sena members.”* This shows that she faced strong stigma in the beginning.

She also shared that she has faced disrespect in her work. She said, “people comment about our work... they call us waste collectors in a disrespectful manner.” She also said, “some people say these things in front of children... even children repeat those comments.”

During waste collection, she said, *“some people do not speak politely... they scold and do not show respect.”* This shows that negative behaviour still exists in some places.

While talking about her work, she said, “many households do not properly segregate waste.” At the same time, she said there is some improvement, “people are becoming aware... some even call us to collect waste.”

Regarding user fee, she said, “most people pay... but some still delay... sometimes they do not pay for up to three months.”

Outside her work, she said, “neighbours treat me well,” which shows that personal relationships are better compared to work situations.

In her personal life, she said, “this job has not affected my life... I find this work interesting.” She also said, “my family members do not face teasing.”

Emotionally, she said, “in the beginning it affected me... it affected my mental health.” But now she said, “now I do not mind... it does not affect me.”

She said, “now society is giving more value... people understand the importance of user fee and waste management.”

For her, dignity means “respect and recognition... being valued for our work and keeping the community clean.”

She also said, “uniform gives identity... now people value us more because of it.” She said people see her as a government worker, but “sometimes they think we get government salary.”

She said, “now there is positive change... people value our work more... especially after user fee became compulsory.”

When facing disrespect, she said, “even if people scold, I do not argue... I continue my work.”

Her motivation is that “this is community service... waste causes health problems... this work helps people.”

Regarding support, she said, “there is no government support... income is only from collection.” But she said “awareness programs are conducted.”

Finally, she said, “in the beginning I felt hurt... slowly I became strong... now I feel proud of my work.” She also said that this work helps keep the community clean and healthy.

4.3.5 RESPONDENT FIVE

MRS N is a 45-year-old married woman from a coastal area. She has studied up to 10th standard and has been working in Haritha karma Sena for the past 3 years. Her monthly income is ₹5000, and she is also contributing to her family through this work.

When she spoke about her experience, she said that earlier the situation was very difficult. She said,

“In the beginning, people had a very negative attitude... they did not give any respect.” She also said that when going for waste collection, “we could see their attitude clearly.” But now she said, “now there is a good change.”

She shared that she has faced disrespect in many situations. She said, “when we go to houses, they say ‘you came to pick waste’ in a disrespectful way.” She also said, “in the beginning people called us scrap collectors and made comments.”

Regarding communication, she said,

“In the beginning they did not speak politely.” But she also said, “after giving many awareness classes, we can now see good changes... by explaining each thing, we are trying to bring small changes.”

While talking about her daily work, she said, “they do not give waste separately... many times they give waste without cleaning it.” She also said, “we told them to clean milk covers and food covers, but they do not do it.”

About user fee, she said, “earlier people argued... they asked ‘why should we give you 50 rupees... doesn’t the government give you salary?’” But now she said, “since the card is compulsory, most people have started paying.”

Outside her work, she said, “neighbours ask why we are going for this job... they look at us differently.”

Regarding gender, she said, “in some places people look at us in a different way.” She also said, “sometimes they even make small children say things... they call us scrap people or waste pickers.”

She also shared a safety issue. She said, “dogs are a big problem... I have been bitten three times.”

In her personal life, she said, “in the beginning family discouraged... at home also they said not to go for this job.” She also said, “family strongly opposed it in the beginning.”

“People’s behaviour made me feel sad at times.” But she also said, “it has not affected my confidence... I chose this job willingly... it is for bringing change in society.”

She said now, “society values us... some people even call and ask why we are not coming to collect waste.”

For her, dignity means “self-respect and respect from others... doing our work honestly and being valued for it.”

She also said about uniform, “when we wear uniform, they look at us differently... as if we are dirty and waste collectors... without uniform they treat us better.”

She said people think it is a government job, but they also ask, “why doesn’t the government pay you?”

She also said, “now there is a good change... people’s mindset has changed... many households call us to give plastic... we now get some respect.”

When facing disrespect, she said, “whatever people say, we do not respond back.”

Her motivation is that “we are doing this for the good of society... it can reduce many health problems.”

Regarding support, she said, “there is very little support... even for health problems we do not get support.” But she said, “awareness classes are conducted.”

Finally, she said, “this job became a source of income... it helped me become financially independent... I can help my husband.” She also said she feels proud that her work helps reduce waste and health problems in society.

4.3.6 RESPONDENT SIX

MRS U is a 50-year-old married woman from a coastal area, educated up to 8th standard, working in Harithakarma Sena for 5 years with a monthly income of ₹5000.

She said that the community was not cooperative earlier, stating “many people change houses often... so cooperation is less” and “some people look at us differently and even move away we hear bad words.” She faced disrespect,

saying “people speak without respect some even take the record book from our hand” and “sometimes even water was not given.”

She also shared that “one drunk person tried to hit me... grabbed my book and threw it away.”

She said earlier behaviour was very bad, but “after awareness classes there is improvement...now some people cooperate.” However, she still faces issues like “they mix everything together” and hesitation in paying fees, though “now most people have started paying.”

She said “earlier it was very difficult when going alone people behaved badly,” and added that “going alone to houses is difficult it creates fear.

” She also said “while going to collect plastic, I feel tired... sometimes dizziness.” “in the beginning it affected me... I even thought of quitting,” but now “it does not affect me.” She believes “this is service to society” and said “I do not argue... I stay calm.”

Finally, she said “now society is slowly valuing our work” and “after joining Harithakarma Sena I became more confident and financially independent.

4.3.7 RESPONDENT SEVEN

Mrs. A is working in Haritha karma Sena and has experienced both negative and positive changes in community behaviour over time. While explaining her experience, she said that only a few people behave well and many people treat them badly because they come for plastic collection.

She said, “while walking through the road, some people move away and make comments.”

She shared that she has faced disrespect in many situations.

She said, “people speak very badly and use disrespectful words... they look at us in a negative way.” Even during awareness classes, she explained that “some people behave very poorly.”

She described an incident during waste collection where people reacted negatively. She said, “they say ‘they have come to collect waste’... and when asking for user fee, people question why they should pay money after giving plastic.”

While talking about communication, she said that earlier people were very rude. She explained,

“Earlier people spoke very badly some even burned plastic or threw it away instead of giving it... they say there is no plastic and no money.” But now she said that “there is improvement and more people are cooperating.”

She also explained the issue of waste segregation. *She said, “households do not properly segregate waste... they mix plastic with food waste... milk covers are not cleaned and everything is given together.”*

Regarding user fee, she said, “people refuse and argue some delay payment for one to three months... they question why they should pay and say government should give salary.”

She also shared that earlier neighbours opposed this job, but now there is a change. She said, “earlier neighbours opposed this job... now they understand its importance and respond better.”

She reported that she has heard many negative comments. She said, “older men speak very badly... they call us waste collectors in a disrespectful way... sometimes children are also encouraged to say such comments.”

Safety is also a concern in her work. She said, *“some people behave badly... there were situations where drunk persons tried to attack... dogs in houses also create safety issues.”* Because of this, she explained that *“I prefer not to go alone... usually we go in pairs.”*

Regarding personal life, she said that the job has not affected her life. She explained, “even though people speak badly, I do not let it affect my life.” She also said that her family did not face teasing.

Emotionally, she said, “in the beginning, such comments affected me mentally... now I do not keep these things in mind and feel satisfied with my work.” She also explained that “initially I felt insulted and lost confidence. now I continue my work with confidence.”

She believes that society has started valuing their work. She said, “now society understands that plastic waste can cause problems... awareness classes helped... more people cooperate.”

For her, dignity means “doing my work with self-respect and being treated with respect... feeling proud and not ashamed.” She also said that “wearing uniform and ID card gives identity and people show more respect.”

She explained that people think it is a government job. She said, “people think we are government workers... but they question why they should pay money.”

She clearly stated that there is a positive change now. She said, “earlier people behaved very badly... now there is a positive change... some people even call us to collect plastic.”

Regarding challenges, she said, “some households do not give user fees regularly... because of this income is reduced.”

As a coping strategy, she said, “I do not respond and avoid arguments... mostly I stay calm and continue my work.”

Her motivation comes from her belief in the work. She said, “this work brings change in society... plastic waste can harm environment... so I feel responsible to continue.”

She also mentioned that “no government support is provided,” but “many awareness classes are conducted.”

Finally, she shared the positive change in her life. She said, “after joining this job, *I became more independent... the income helps me manage household needs and support my family.*”

4.3.7 RESPONDENT EIGHT

Mrs. H, a 50-year-old Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) worker from Nellanad, shared her experiences regarding social stigma, discrimination, challenges, coping mechanisms, and the positive changes she has experienced through her work in waste management. Her narrative reflects the struggles faced by sanitation workers as well as the gradual acceptance and recognition they have gained within the community over time.

Mrs. H explained that when she first joined Haritha Karma Sena, community members often treated waste collection workers with disrespect. People were reluctant to interact with them and frequently avoided cooperating during waste collection visits. She stated:

“Earlier, people spoke to us very badly. When we went to collect waste, they would not open their doors even if we called many times. Sometimes they would simply leave the plastic outside and avoid interacting with us.”

She noted that although significant changes have occurred in recent years, some households still refuse to cooperate and continue to treat waste workers negatively. However, compared to the past, community attitudes have improved considerably.

The respondent reported experiencing verbal disrespect and humiliation because of the nature of her work. She explained that some people considered waste collection an inferior occupation and questioned why they should cooperate with HKS workers. According to her:

“People used to question why they should show us their plastic waste or cooperate with us. They treated us as if our work had no value.”

Mrs. H recalled several incidents where residents intentionally avoided giving plastic waste despite having it in their homes. She explained:

“When people saw us coming to collect plastic waste, some would immediately go inside their houses. Even if they had plastic waste, they would say that there was none and send us away.”

She further stated that impolite communication remains a challenge. Some residents continue to speak harshly, particularly when HKS workers request user fees for waste collection services.

Another major issue identified by the respondent was the lack of proper waste segregation. Although awareness classes and campaigns have been conducted repeatedly, many households still fail to separate waste correctly. Mrs. H stated:

“We have conducted many awareness programmes on waste segregation, but only a few people follow them. Many households continue to give mixed waste.”

She explained that residents often fail to clean plastic materials before disposal and sometimes mix hazardous items such as broken glass, footwear, and medical waste with regular plastic waste, making waste handling difficult and unsafe.

The respondent also described frequent disagreements regarding user fees. Many community members refuse to pay and argue that the government already provides salaries to HKS workers. She shared:

“People ask why they should pay us. They say the government already gives us money, so why should they pay user fees as well?”

These situations often create emotional stress and frustration.

Regarding her relationship with neighbours, Mrs. H stated that attitudes have improved significantly. Initially, neighbours questioned her decision to engage in waste collection work, but over time they became more understanding and supportive.

As a woman working in waste management, Mrs. H reported facing additional challenges. She explained that female workers are sometimes subjected to inappropriate comments and disrespectful remarks while visiting households. According to her:

“When we visit houses, some people call us by inappropriate names and make unpleasant comments.”

The respondent also reported receiving negative labels because of her occupation. She stated that some people referred to her simply as a “plastic waste collector” and associated her work with dirt and impurity.

Safety is another concern in her daily work. Mrs. H explained that workers rarely visit houses alone and usually travel in pairs. One of the most common problems they face is aggressive dogs in residential areas.

“We never go alone. We go in pairs. One of the biggest problems we face is dogs. Sometimes it becomes difficult even to enter a compound because of them.”

Although many people initially opposed her decision to take up this occupation, Mrs. H stated that she joined the work willingly and continues because she believes it is meaningful. She also mentioned that her family members experienced some embarrassment and teasing during the early years because of societal attitudes towards sanitation work. However, such incidents have reduced considerably as public awareness has increased.

The emotional impact of stigma was significant during the beginning of her career. Mrs. H admitted that the negative treatment she received affected her deeply and made her consider leaving the job.

“In the beginning, these negative experiences affected me a lot. At one point, I even thought about quitting this job.”

However, with time she developed a stronger understanding of the importance of her role and became more committed to continuing her work.

The respondent also reported that stigma initially affected her confidence and self-respect. Feelings of neglect and humiliation lowered her self-esteem. Nevertheless, she emphasized that these effects gradually diminished as she gained experience and recognition.

Mrs. H believes that society now values the contribution of Haritha Karma Sena workers more than before. She explained that households increasingly recognize the importance of proper waste management and appreciate the services provided by HKS workers.

According to her, dignity in this occupation means receiving respect and recognition for the valuable service provided to society. She stated that the use of uniforms and identity cards has significantly improved public perception of their work.

“When we wear our uniform and identity card, people show us more respect. Some even call us and ask us to come and collect plastic waste.”

Mrs. H also stated that many people now recognize HKS workers as part of the government system. However, this recognition sometimes creates misunderstandings,

as some residents assume that workers receive sufficient government salaries and therefore refuse to pay user fees.

The respondent acknowledged that awareness programmes organized by Haritha Karma Sena and government agencies have helped reduce stigma. Through community education and door-to-door awareness campaigns, people have become more aware of waste management practices and the importance of supporting HKS workers.

Despite these improvements, Mrs. H identified irregular payment of user fees as the major challenge she currently faces. Since user fees form an important part of her income, non-payment directly affects her earnings.

When faced with disrespectful behaviour, Mrs. H adopts a calm and patient approach. Rather than arguing, she chooses to explain the importance of waste management and the role of Haritha Karma Sena workers.

“Even if people speak badly to me, I do not argue with them. I try to explain our work, but some people still do not understand.”

Her motivation to continue in this occupation comes from the belief that she is contributing to the well-being of society. She feels proud that her work helps keep the environment clean and reduces health risks caused by improper waste disposal. She also values the opportunity to earn an income and achieve financial independence.

“This work benefits society, and it also gave me employment when I had no job. Even though the income is small, it helps me remain independent.”

Mrs. H expressed dissatisfaction regarding government support, stating that there is very little direct assistance available to HKS workers apart from limited support during hospitalization.

Despite the challenges she has faced, Mrs. H reported several positive changes in her life since joining Haritha Karma Sena. The income she earns has enabled her to become financially independent and contribute to her household. She believes that her work has not only improved her own life but has also played an important role in creating a cleaner and healthier community.

4.4 THEME AND SUB THEME

THEME	SUB THEME
THEME 1 EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL SITGMA	• Use of Disrespectful Words • Negative Comments • Avoidance Behaviour • Improper Waste Segregation
THEME 2 GENDER AND STIGMA	• Women Facing Difficulty • Safety Concerns
THEME 3 IMPACT OF SOCIAL STIGMA ON PERSONAL AND FAMILY LIFE	• Emotional distress • Family opposition and teasing • Reduced impact over time
THEME 4. FORMAL RECOGNITION AND RESPECT	• Uniform and ID Card Giving Identity • Seen as Government Workers • Improved Respect After Awareness
THEME 5 COPING STRATEGIES	• Avoiding Arguments • Financial Independence • Increased Confidence

4.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

4.5 Theme 1: Experiences of Social Stigma

The findings reveal that Haritha karma Sena workers experience various forms of social stigma in their daily work. This stigma is expressed through the use of disrespectful language, negative comments, avoidance behaviour, and lack of cooperation in waste management practices. Many respondents reported that, especially in the initial stages, people treated them with disrespect and viewed their work as inferior. Although there has been improvement over time due to awareness, subtle forms of stigma still persist in the community.

Mrs. J said that “people comment about our work and call us waste collectors in a disrespectful manner, and sometimes they even say these things in front of children, which makes it more hurtful.”

Mrs. C said that “some people call us in a disrespectful way like waste picker or the person who collects waste, and earlier people even used to move away when they saw us in the community.”

Mrs. S said that “some people are very judgmental and do not give plastic waste properly, and sometimes they move away after seeing us in uniform and behave differently.”

Mrs. U said that “people speak without respect and sometimes even take the record book from our hand, and earlier they behaved very badly and even refused to give water.”

Mrs. K said that “some households do not properly segregate waste and some people delay or refuse to pay the user fee, and they also argue when we tell them about proper waste management.”

4.5.1 Use of Disrespectful Words

This sub-theme highlights how respondents were subjected to disrespectful language that reduced their dignity and identity. Many workers reported that they were labeled in degrading ways, especially during the early stages of their work, reflecting occupational stigma associated with waste collection.

Verbatim:

Mrs. J said that “people comment about our work and call us waste collectors in a disrespectful manner; and sometimes they even say these things in front of children, which makes it more hurtful for us.”

Mrs. C said that “some people call us in a disrespectful way like waste picker or the person who collects waste, and earlier people used to speak like this very often.”

4.5.2 Negative Comments

Respondents experienced negative and judgmental comments that affected their emotional well-being. These comments often reflected societal bias and lack of respect towards their occupation.

Mrs. A said that “older men speak very badly and use disrespectful words, and sometimes even children are encouraged to say such comments, which makes us feel insulted.”

Mrs. S said that “some people are very judgmental and do not give plastic waste properly, and they behave as if our work has no value.”

4.5.3 Avoidance Behaviour

Avoidance behaviour was another form of stigma where people physically distanced themselves or behaved differently when interacting with workers. This reflects underlying social exclusion.

Verbatim:

Mrs. S said that “some people move away after seeing us in uniform and behave differently, which clearly shows that they are not comfortable with us.”

Mrs. C said that “earlier people used to move away when they saw us in the community, but now that situation has changed to some extent.”

4.5.4 Lack of Proper Waste Practices

Lack of cooperation in waste segregation and disposal reflects indirect stigma and disregard for the workers' responsibilities.

Mrs. K explained that “some households do not properly segregate waste and even after telling them many times they do not follow instructions and also argue with us.”

Mrs. N reported that “they do not clean milk covers and food covers and give everything mixed together, even though we repeatedly tell them to separate it properly.”

4.6 Theme 2: Gender and Stigma

The study indicates that gender plays an important role in shaping the experiences of stigma among Harithakarma Sena workers. Women workers face additional physical and social challenges due to the nature of their work and societal attitudes. Safety concerns, heavy workload, and vulnerability to harassment are key issues highlighted by the respondents.

Mrs. S said that “women face more difficulty because the work is heavy and sometimes people do not value our work, even though we are doing an important service for the community.”

Mrs. K said that “women face more difficulties in this job, but they continue because they are working for the community and want to contribute to society.”

4.6.1 Women Facing Difficulty

This sub-theme highlights the additional burden faced by women workers due to physical demands and societal attitudes.

Verbatim:

Mrs. S stated that “women face more difficulty because the work is heavy and sometimes people do not value our work even though we are doing an important service.”

Mrs. K shared that “women face more difficulties in this job, but they continue because they are working for the community and want to contribute.”

4.6.2 Safety Concerns

Safety concerns emerged as a significant issue, particularly for women working in field conditions.

Verbatim:

Mrs. N reported that “dogs are a big problem and I have been bitten three times while going for work, which makes me feel scared to go alone.”

Mrs. U explained that “one drunk person tried to hit me and grabbed my book and threw it away, and earlier when going alone people behaved badly which created fear.”

Mrs. A added that “there were situations where drunk persons tried to attack and dogs in houses also create safety issues, so we usually prefer going in pairs.”

4.7. Theme 3: Impact of Stigma (Personal & Family Life)

Social stigma had a considerable impact on the personal and family lives of Haritha Karma Sena members, particularly during the initial stages of their work. Respondents described feelings of shame, embarrassment, emotional distress, and reduced self-confidence resulting from negative comments and social attitudes towards their occupation. These experiences affected their mental well-being and social interactions, making it difficult for some workers to adjust to their role in waste management.

The findings also indicate a gradual transformation in the way participants perceived and responded to stigma. Over time, many workers developed resilience and a stronger sense of self-worth. Increased awareness about the importance of their work, along with continued engagement in their occupation, helped them overcome feelings of inferiority and gain confidence.

Mrs. J said that “in the beginning it affected me a lot and it also affected my mental health, but now I do not mind such comments and I feel stronger.”

Mrs. A said that “in the beginning such comments affected me mentally and I felt insulted and lost confidence, but now I continue my work with confidence and do not keep these things in mind.”

4.7.1 Emotional Distress

The study shows that social stigma deeply affected the emotional well-being of Harithakarma Sena workers, especially in the beginning of their work. Many respondents felt hurt, insulted, and emotionally disturbed when people treated them with disrespect or looked down on their job. Negative comments, avoidance behaviour, and humiliating words reduced their confidence and made them feel socially excluded. Some workers shared that such experiences affected their mental peace and made them feel sad and discouraged. However, with time, many of them slowly became

emotionally stronger. Their work experience, confidence, and belief in the importance of their service helped them overcome these emotional struggles and continue their work proudly.

Verbatim:

Mrs. J shared that “in the beginning it affected me a lot and it even affected my mental health, but slowly I became strong and now I do not mind such comments.”

Mrs. A reflected that “in the beginning such comments affected me mentally and I felt insulted and lost confidence, but now I continue my work with confidence.”

4.7.2 Family Opposition and Teasing

Family and societal reactions initially discouraged some workers from continuing their job.

Verbatim:

Mrs. N mentioned that “in the beginning my family discouraged me and said not to go for this job, and even at home they strongly opposed it.”

Mrs. A noted that “earlier neighbours opposed this job and did not support us, but now they have started understanding its importance.”

4.7.3 Reduced Impact Over Time

The study shows that the emotional impact of social stigma gradually reduced over time among Harithakarma Sena workers. In the beginning, many respondents felt hurt, ashamed, and emotionally disturbed because of negative comments and disrespectful behaviour from society. However, with continuous work experience and increased awareness in the community, they slowly developed confidence and emotional strength. Many workers learned to ignore criticism and focus on the value of their service to society. Financial independence, self-confidence, and public recognition also helped them overcome emotional struggles. Over time, the respondents became more resilient and continued their work with pride, confidence, and a stronger sense of self-worth.

Verbatim:

Mrs. U stated that “in the beginning it affected me and I even thought of quitting, but now it does not affect me and I continue my work confidently.”

Mrs. J expressed that “slowly I became strong and now I feel proud of my work and do not get affected by what people say.”

4.8 Theme 4. Formal Recognition and Respect

Formal recognition through uniforms, ID cards, and awareness programs has significantly improved the social status of Harithakarma Sena workers. Respondents reported that these factors have helped them gain identity, respect, and acceptance in society. Awareness initiatives have also played a major role in changing public attitudes.

4.8.1 Uniform and ID Card Giving Identity

Uniform and ID cards contribute to identity formation and improved respect.

Verbatim:

Mrs. K stated that “wearing a uniform and ID card changes how people treat us in a positive way and now they show more respect.”

Mrs. C mentioned that “people show more respect when we wear uniform and ID card and they recognize us easily.”

4.8.2 Seen as Government Workers

Perception as government workers enhances their social recognition.

Verbatim:

Mrs. C expressed that “many people now see us as government workers, which makes them treat us with more respect.”

Mrs. A explained that “people think we are government workers, but at the same time they question why they should pay money.”

4.8.3 Improved Respect After Awareness

Awareness initiatives have contributed significantly to positive changes in community attitudes.

Verbatim:

Mrs. U mentioned that “after awareness classes there is improvement and now some people cooperate and behave better.”

Mrs. S stated that “society values us now because people are more aware and negative attitudes have reduced.”

4.9 Theme 5. Community Awareness and Behavioural Change

The findings reveal that awareness programs and continuous interaction with the community have helped improve public attitudes toward Harithakarma Sena workers and waste management practices. Earlier, many people showed negative attitudes, but awareness regarding cleanliness, waste segregation, and health issues gradually changed community behaviour. Although some negative attitudes still remain, the level of cooperation and respect has improved over time.

4.9.1 Increased Public Awareness

Respondents explained that awareness programs helped people understand the importance of waste management.

Verbatim:

Mrs. S stated that

“society values us now because people are more aware and negative attitudes have reduced.”

Mrs. U explained that

“after awareness classes there is improvement and now some people cooperate and behave better.”

Mrs. C mentioned that

“now there is a good change and people’s mindset has changed.”

4.9.2 Improved Community Cooperation

Improved community cooperation was identified as a positive outcome of the awareness initiatives undertaken by Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members and local self-government institutions. Continuous awareness campaigns, household visits, and educational activities have helped increase public understanding of proper waste management practices. As a result, community members have become more supportive of waste collection activities and actively participate in maintaining cleanliness within their localities.

Respondents noted that many households now cooperate with HKS workers by properly storing and preparing segregated waste before collection. In some cases,

residents voluntarily contact HKS members to ensure timely collection of waste materials. Such cooperation has contributed to the smoother functioning of waste management services and has strengthened the relationship between HKS workers and the community.

Verbatim:

Mrs. J stated that

“people are becoming aware and some even call us to collect waste.”

Mrs. C explained that

“many households keep the plastic ready before we arrive.”

Mrs. A mentioned that

“more people are cooperating now and some people even call us to collect plastic.”

4.9.3 Awareness About Health and Environment

Awareness about health and environmental issues emerged as an important factor influencing public acceptance of waste management activities. Respondents believed that people are gradually recognizing the connection between proper waste management, environmental protection, and public health. Increased awareness has encouraged community members to support waste segregation, waste collection, and other sanitation-related initiatives.

The respondents also expressed a strong sense of responsibility toward protecting the environment and improving community well-being. They viewed their work as an essential service that helps reduce pollution, prevent health hazards, and promote a cleaner and healthier living environment. This understanding has strengthened their commitment to continuing their work despite various challenges.

Verbatim:

Mrs. K stated that

“waste management reduces health problems and improves cleanliness in society.”

Mrs. N explained that

“we are doing this for the good of society and it can reduce many health problems.”

Mrs. A mentioned that

“plastic waste can harm the environment so I feel responsible to continue this work.”

4.10 Theme 6: Major Challenges Faced

The gradual improvement in social acceptance and recognition, Harithakarma Sena workers continue to encounter several challenges in their daily work. The respondents reported difficulties related to improper waste segregation by households, refusal or delay in user-fee payments, and physical health problems arising from the nature of their work. These challenges increase their workload, create financial insecurity, and affect their physical well-being. The findings suggest that while awareness and recognition have improved, operational and occupational challenges remain significant barriers that influence the workers' overall work experience and quality of life.

Verbatim:

Mrs. K said that “some households do not properly segregate waste and some people delay or refuse to pay the user fee, and they also argue about it.”

Mrs. A said that “households do not properly segregate waste and they mix plastic with food waste, and some people delay payment for one to three months and question why they should pay.”

4.10.1 Improper Waste Segregation

Improper waste segregation continues to be a major operational challenge faced by Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members during waste collection and management activities. Effective waste management depends on households separating biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste at the source. However, many households fail to follow proper segregation practices, resulting in mixed waste being handed over to HKS workers. This increases the workload of workers, affects the efficiency of waste collection, and creates difficulties in recycling and processing activities.

When waste is not segregated properly, recyclable materials such as plastic, paper, and metal become contaminated with food waste and other organic materials. This reduces the quality and value of recyclable waste and often requires additional sorting efforts by HKS members. Improper segregation also creates unhygienic working conditions, exposes workers to health risks, and increases the time required for waste handling and disposal. Despite continuous awareness campaigns and repeated instructions provided

by HKS members, some households continue to neglect proper waste segregation practices.

Verbatim:

Mrs. A reported that “households do not properly segregate waste and they mix plastic with food waste, which makes our work very difficult.”

Mrs. K explained that “some households do not properly segregate waste even after repeated instructions.”

4.10.2 Refusal and Delay in User Fee

The findings reveal that delayed or refused user-fee payments create financial difficulties for Harithakarma Sena workers. Since user fees are a major source of income, irregular payments affect their economic stability. The findings also suggest that such behaviour reflects limited public responsibility toward waste management services.

Verbatim:

Mrs. K stated that “some people delay or refuse to pay the user fee and they argue about it when we ask.”

Mrs. J mentioned that “most people pay but some still delay payment for months and do not show responsibility.”

4.10.3 Physical Health Problems

Physical health problems emerged as a significant challenge among Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members. The nature of waste collection work requires workers to travel long distances, carry heavy loads, and work under varying weather conditions, which often leads to physical strain and exhaustion. Continuous exposure to waste materials, unpleasant odors, dust, and other environmental hazards further increases the risk of health-related issues.

Many respondents reported experiencing fatigue, body pain, dizziness, and other physical discomforts during their daily work. In addition, workers face safety risks while moving through residential areas for waste collection. Stray animals, particularly dogs, pose a serious threat to their safety and well-being. Such occupational hazards not only affect their physical health but also create fear and stress while performing their duties.

4.11 Theme 7: Coping Strategies

The findings reveal that Harithakarma Sena workers have adopted various coping strategies to manage the social stigma and work-related challenges they encounter. Rather than confronting negative attitudes directly, many respondents preferred to remain patient, avoid conflicts, and continue their work with determination. Over time, they developed resilience and became less affected by criticism and discrimination. Financial independence gained through employment served as an important source of motivation, helping workers maintain self-confidence and self-respect. The findings also indicate that their commitment to environmental cleanliness and community well-being provides a sense of purpose, enabling them to cope with difficulties and continue their work despite ongoing challenges.

Verbatim:

Mrs. N said that “whatever people say, we do not respond back and we continue our work because we are doing this for the good of society.”

Mrs. C said that “this job became a source of income and helped me become financially independent, and I can now support my family.”

4.11.1 Avoiding Arguments

Workers adopt calm and non-confrontational strategies to manage difficult situations.

Mrs. K explained that “I do not argue and I avoid conflicts while doing my work because I believe this work is important.”

Mrs. N stated that “whatever people say, we do not respond back and we continue our work without reacting.”

4.11.2 Financial Independence

Financial independence emerged as one of the key empowerment outcomes experienced by Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members. The income earned through waste collection activities has provided women with an opportunity to contribute to household expenses and reduce their financial dependence on other family members. For many respondents, the job serves as a stable source of income that supports their daily needs and improves their economic security.

The earnings from HKS work enable women to participate in household financial decision-making and enhance their sense of autonomy. Financial independence not only improves their economic condition but also contributes to greater self-reliance and social recognition within their families and communities.

Verbatim

Mrs. C mentioned that *“this job became a source of income and helped me become financially independent and support my family.”*

Mrs. A expressed that *“the income from this job helps me manage household needs and support my family.”*

4.11.3 Increased Confidence

Increased confidence was another important dimension of empowerment reported by the respondents. Through their involvement in waste management activities, HKS members have developed greater self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of pride in their work. Regular interaction with community members, participation in public activities, and the ability to earn an income have positively influenced their perception of themselves and their capabilities.

The experience of contributing to environmental cleanliness and community well-being has also strengthened their sense of purpose and social value. As a result, many women reported feeling more confident in expressing their opinions, interacting with others, and carrying out their responsibilities.

Mrs. U stated that *“after joining this work I became more confident and financially independent and now I feel proud.”* Mrs. A shared that *“now I continue my work with confidence and feel proud of what I am doing.”*

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, SGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the study titled “*Experiences of Social Stigma among Haritha Karma Sena Members in Thiruvananthapuram.*” The findings are based on data collected from eight Haritha Karma Sena members through face-to-face guided interviews, observations, and relevant documents. The purpose of this chapter is to explore and understand the participants' experiences of social stigma, community attitudes, occupational challenges, and the impact of these experiences on their personal, social, and emotional lives.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and the findings are presented according to the major themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. The chapter also examines the role of dignity, recognition, coping strategies, and the challenges faced by Haritha Karma Sena members in their daily work. Through the voices of the participants, this chapter provides a deeper understanding of the realities and lived experiences of workers engaged in waste management services and highlights the social and occupational issues that influence their well-being and social status.

5.2 Findings and Discussion

5.2.1 Transformation of Stigma from Overt to Subtle Forms

The findings of the study indicate that social stigma towards Haritha Karma Sena members has undergone a significant transformation over time. While stigma continues to exist, its nature has shifted from overt and direct forms of discrimination to more subtle and indirect expressions. In the earlier stages of the Haritha Karma Sena initiative, many workers reported experiencing open disrespect, verbal abuse, humiliation, and rejection from community members. They were often referred to as "waste collectors" or "scrap collectors" in a derogatory manner, and some people openly expressed negative attitudes towards them because of their involvement in waste management work. Such experiences created feelings of embarrassment, sadness, and social exclusion among the workers.

The study reveals that increased public awareness regarding waste management, environmental sustainability, and public health has contributed to a gradual reduction in these visible forms of discrimination. Awareness campaigns, community engagement activities, and the formal recognition of Haritha Karma Sena under the Local Self Government system have improved public understanding of the importance of their work. As a result, many participants reported that people now interact with them more respectfully, acknowledge their contribution, and cooperate more during waste collection activities.

Despite these positive changes, stigma has not been completely eliminated. Instead, it has become more subtle and less visible. Some participants reported that certain community members continue to maintain social distance, avoid interaction, or display indirect signs of discomfort when engaging with them. Others noted that although people appreciate the waste management service, they still perceive the occupation as low in social status. This creates a contradiction where the service is valued, but the workers themselves are not always fully respected or recognized.

The findings therefore suggest that the nature of stigma has evolved rather than disappeared. While overt discrimination has reduced considerably, subtle forms of occupational stigma continue to affect the social identity and recognition of Haritha Karma Sena members. This highlights the need for continued awareness programmes, community sensitization, and initiatives that promote the dignity of labour and social acceptance of waste management workers.

5.2.2 Conditional Social Acceptance Based on Utility

The study found that the social acceptance received by Haritha Karma Sena members is often conditional and based primarily on the usefulness of the services they provide rather than on genuine respect for their identity and occupation. Many participants reported that community members generally cooperate with them when they require waste collection services, particularly because the presence of Haritha Karma Sena has contributed to cleaner surroundings and improved waste management practices. This suggests that people recognize the practical importance of the service provided by the workers.

Several participants reported difficulties related to delayed user-fee payments, resistance to waste segregation, and occasional negative comments about their occupation. While community members benefit from the services provided, some continue to hesitate in fulfilling their responsibilities as service users. This contradiction highlights that acceptance is often based on convenience and necessity rather than a genuine recognition of the dignity and value of the workers.

The findings indicate that Haritha Karma Sena members are frequently appreciated for the work they do but are not always accorded the same level of respect as individuals. Such conditional acceptance reflects the persistence of occupational stigma and suggests that societal attitudes have not fully shifted towards viewing waste management workers as professionals contributing to environmental sustainability and public health. Therefore, efforts are needed to promote not only awareness about waste management but also respect for the workers who perform these essential services.

5.2.3 Occupational Stigma Rooted in Notions of Dirt and Inferiority

The study reveals that the occupational stigma experienced by Haritha Karma Sena members is deeply rooted in societal perceptions of waste as dirty, unpleasant, and socially inferior. Since waste management work involves handling discarded materials, workers are often associated with the negative characteristics attributed to waste itself. As a result, the occupation is frequently viewed as low-status work, despite its importance for maintaining public health and environmental cleanliness.

Many participants reported being referred to by derogatory labels such as “waste collectors” or “scrap collectors.” Some also experienced avoidance behaviour, disrespectful communication, and negative attitudes from certain community members. In a few cases, respondents noted that even children repeated such labels after hearing them from adults, indicating how stigmatizing attitudes are socially learned and reproduced within communities.

These experiences reflect broader cultural beliefs regarding cleanliness, purity, and social status. Occupations involving direct contact with waste are often considered undesirable, leading to the marginalization of those who perform such work. Consequently, Haritha Karma Sena members may face challenges in gaining social recognition and respect despite their significant contribution to society.

The findings suggest that occupational stigma is not merely an individual experience but is embedded within social and cultural perceptions of waste-related work. Addressing such stigma requires sustained awareness programmes, community education, and initiatives that promote the dignity of labour. Recognizing waste management workers as essential environmental service providers can help challenge existing stereotypes and foster greater social inclusion and respect.

5.2.4 Gendered Nature of Stigma and Double Burden

The findings of the present study reveal that the experience of stigma among Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members is strongly gendered. As women constitute the majority of HKS workers, they not only face occupational stigma associated with waste management work but also encounter challenges that arise from prevailing gender norms and expectations. This creates a double burden, where women must simultaneously negotiate the social devaluation of their occupation and the inequalities attached to their gender.

The participants reported that their work is often perceived as inferior because it involves handling waste. Such perceptions result in a lack of social recognition and respect from sections of the community. Male workers, women are additionally expected to fulfill traditional domestic responsibilities, including household management, caregiving, and family duties. Consequently, they experience increased physical and emotional strain as they attempt to balance paid employment with unpaid domestic labour.

5.2.5 Emotional Distress and Gradual Psychological Adaptation

The findings of the present study indicate that experiences of social stigma initially caused considerable emotional distress among Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members. Many participants reported feelings of sadness, humiliation, embarrassment, and disappointment when they encountered negative attitudes, disrespectful behavior, or social rejection because of their occupation. Such experiences affected their self-esteem and created psychological strain, particularly during the early stages of their employment. Being associated with waste collection work often exposed them to stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes, leading some participants to feel undervalued despite the important service they provided to society.

5.2.6 Role of Awareness in Changing Community Behaviour

The findings of the present study highlight the significant role of awareness in reducing social stigma and promoting positive community attitudes toward Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members. Participants consistently reported that community behaviour has gradually improved as public awareness regarding waste management, environmental sustainability, and public health has increased. Awareness initiatives conducted by local self-government institutions, Haritha Kerala Mission, and Haritha Karma Sena members themselves have contributed to greater understanding of the importance of waste segregation and scientific waste management practices. As a result, many community members have become more cooperative and respectful toward HKS workers.

5.2.7 Formal Recognition Enhancing Identity and Respect

The study found that formal recognition plays a significant role in improving the social identity, dignity, and public acceptance of Haritha Karma Sena members. Most participants reported that the introduction of uniforms and identity cards has positively influenced the way they are perceived and treated by society. These symbols of official recognition help workers establish themselves as part of a formal waste management system rather than being viewed as informal waste collectors. Several respondents noted that community members show greater respect when they wear their uniforms and carry official identification. The uniform serves as a visible marker of legitimacy and professionalism, helping to reduce negative stereotypes associated with waste management work. In many cases, participants stated that people increasingly recognize them as workers contributing to public welfare and environmental sustainability. Formal recognition also contributes to the workers' self-esteem and occupational pride. Participants expressed that uniforms and identity cards provide them with a sense of belonging, responsibility, and social status. Being recognized as part of an organized government-supported initiative has enhanced their confidence and strengthened their professional identity. The findings suggest that formal recognition not only improves public perception but also empowers workers by reinforcing their sense of dignity and value within society.

5.2.8 Persistent Structural and Work-Related Challenges

Although the study indicates a gradual improvement in public attitudes toward Haritha Karma Sena members, several structural and work-related challenges continue to affect their daily functioning and overall well-being. Many participants reported difficulties arising from improper waste segregation by households, which increases their workload and makes waste collection more difficult and time-consuming. The lack of cooperation from some residents continues to be a significant obstacle to effective waste management.

Another major challenge identified by the participants is the irregular payment of user fees. Several workers stated that some households delay payments, refuse to pay, or question the necessity of paying for waste collection services. Since the income of many Haritha Karma Sena members depends largely on user-fee collection, such irregularities create financial insecurity and affect their economic stability.

The study also highlights the lack of adequate institutional support available to workers. Participants reported concerns regarding limited welfare benefits, insufficient health and safety support, inadequate protective equipment, and the absence of regular financial assistance during illness or emergencies. In addition, workers continue to face occupational risks associated with handling waste, including physical strain, exposure to unhygienic conditions, and other health hazards.

These findings indicate that while social recognition has improved in many areas, systemic and operational challenges remain unresolved. Addressing these issues requires stronger institutional support, improved public cooperation, better implementation of waste segregation practices, and enhanced welfare measures to ensure the well-being and sustainability of the Haritha Karma Sena workforce.

5.2.9 Economic Independence as Empowerment

The study finds that Haritha Karma Sena provides an important source of financial independence and empowerment for women workers. Many respondents explained that the income earned through this work helped them support their families, manage household expenses, and reduce financial dependence on others. The job also increased their confidence, decision-making ability, and sense of self-worth. Despite facing social stigma and work-related challenges, the respondents continued their work because it provided economic security and personal satisfaction. Financial independence helped

many women feel more respected within the family and society. The findings highlight that employment in Harithakarma Sena not only supports livelihood but also promotes women's empowerment and confidence.

5.2.10 Passive Coping Strategies and Silent Resistance

Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) members predominantly employ passive and non-confrontational coping strategies when faced with social stigma, discrimination, and negative treatment from community members. Rather than directly challenging or confronting stigmatizing behaviour, most participants reported choosing to remain calm, avoid arguments, and continue their work despite experiencing disrespect or humiliation. These strategies help workers manage daily challenges and maintain their emotional well-being; however, they also reflect the limited social and institutional power available to challenge stigma openly.

5.2.11 Waste Segregation Failure Reflects Public Negligence Toward Workers

The study finds that improper waste segregation is not only a technical issue but also reflects the lack of public responsibility and sensitivity toward Harithakarma Sena workers. Even after repeated awareness classes and instructions, many households continue to provide mixed, unclean, and unsafe waste materials. Workers explained that such practices increase their workload, create health risks, and show disregard for their labour and dignity. The findings indicate that the failure to segregate waste properly indirectly reinforces occupational stigma, as workers are forced to handle unhygienic waste under unsafe conditions. This behaviour also reflects limited public understanding of the difficulties faced by sanitation workers.

5.2.12 Community Acceptance is Gradual and Linked to Awareness Creation

The study reveals that social acceptance of Harithakarma Sena workers developed slowly through continuous awareness activities and regular interaction with the community. In the initial stages, many workers faced rejection, disrespect, poor cooperation, and negative attitudes from households because people lacked awareness about waste management and the importance of their work. Over time, awareness classes, public campaigns, and discussions about health and environmental cleanliness helped change people's behaviour and attitudes. Respondents explained that gradual

improvements in waste segregation, user fee payment, and public cooperation were mainly the result of sustained awareness efforts. The findings suggest that community acceptance is a gradual social process shaped through continuous education and interaction rather than immediate change.

5.2.13 Women Employment Opportunity

The study reveals that Harithakarma Sena has created important employment opportunities for women, especially those from economically weaker backgrounds. Many respondents explained that this work helped them become financially independent and support their families. The job also increased their confidence, self-respect, and social participation. Even though the work involves stigma and challenges, the women continue because it provides income and a sense of purpose. The findings show that Harithakarma Sena acts as a source of women empowerment and livelihood security.

5.2.14 Financial Independence

Employment in Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) has contributed significantly to the financial independence of the respondents. Many participants reported that the income earned through their work enabled them to meet household expenses, support their families, and manage their daily needs without relying entirely on spouses, relatives, or external sources of financial assistance. For several women, this employment represented an important opportunity to generate a regular income and gain greater control over their economic lives.

financial independence has contributed to the empowerment of women by providing them with a sense of dignity and self-worth. Participants expressed satisfaction in being able to earn an income through their own efforts and support their families despite the challenges associated with their work. The ability to generate income has reduced feelings of dependency and increased their confidence in handling personal and family-related matters.

5.2.15 CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study reveal that Harithakarma Sena workers continue to experience different forms of social stigma despite playing an essential role in waste management and environmental protection. The stigma is reflected through disrespectful comments, avoidance behaviour, poor waste segregation practices, and lack of cooperation from some members of the community. However, the study also shows that there has been a gradual positive change in public attitudes due to continuous awareness programs and increased understanding about waste management and health issues.

The findings further highlight that women workers face additional gender-based challenges such as safety risks, physical strain, and emotional stress. In the initial stages, many respondents experienced emotional distress, low confidence, and social rejection, but over time they developed resilience and coping strategies. Financial independence through Haritha karma Sena work also improved their confidence, self-worth, and social participation.

At the same time, the study identifies persistent structural challenges such as irregular user fee payments, lack of institutional support, and unsafe working conditions. Overall, the findings indicate that while social acceptance has improved gradually, occupational stigma and work-related difficulties still remain part of the lived experiences of Haritha karma Sena workers.

5.2.16 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The present study explored the experiences of social stigma among Harithakarma Sena workers in Thiruvananthapuram District. The findings reveal that although social attitudes toward workers have improved over time, stigma continues to exist in subtle forms. The discussion of the findings is presented in relation to theoretical perspectives and previous research.

Transformation of Stigma from Overt to Subtle Forms

According to Goffman's Stigma Theory (1963), stigma arises when society labels certain individuals or groups as different and socially undesirable. The present study found that workers previously experienced direct discrimination, rejection, and disrespect from community members. However, respondents reported that such behaviours have gradually reduced due to awareness programmes and increased public

interaction. Despite this positive change, subtle forms of stigma such as avoidance behaviour and differential treatment continue to exist. These findings suggest that stigma has not disappeared completely but has transformed into less visible forms. This supports Goffman's argument that stigmatized individuals often continue to experience social exclusion even when overt discrimination declines.

Occupational Stigma Rooted in Notions of Dirt and Inferiority

The findings indicate that the stigma experienced by Harithakarma Sena workers is closely linked to societal perceptions of waste and sanitation work. Respondents reported being called disrespectful names and being treated differently because of the nature of their occupation. Goffman (1963) explains that occupations associated with dirt, impurity, and manual labour are often socially devalued. The present findings reflect this reality, as workers continue to experience negative attitudes rooted in cultural beliefs regarding cleanliness and social status. The findings suggest that occupational stigma remains deeply embedded in social perceptions despite improvements in waste management awareness.

Gendered Nature of Stigma and Double Burden

The study found that women workers experience a double burden of occupational stigma and gender-related challenges. Apart from facing negative attitudes toward their work, respondents also reported physical strain, safety concerns, and experiences of harassment. These findings indicate that women sanitation workers face unique challenges because of both their occupation and gender. The results highlight how gender influences the nature and intensity of stigma experienced by Harithakarma Sena workers. Women are expected to perform demanding physical work while also dealing with social judgement and concerns regarding personal safety.

Emotional Distress and Gradual Psychological Adaptation

The findings reveal that stigma initially caused emotional distress, reduced self-confidence, feelings of insult, and mental strain among workers. According to Goffman's Stigma Theory, social rejection can negatively affect an individual's self-concept and social identity. Many respondents explained that negative comments and disrespectful treatment affected their mental well-being during the initial stages of employment. However, over time they gradually adapted to these experiences and

became emotionally stronger. This process of adjustment can be understood through Resilience Theory, which suggests that individuals develop coping mechanisms and psychological strength when facing adversity. The findings demonstrate that workers gradually transformed negative experiences into sources of personal strength and confidence.

Role of Awareness in Changing Community Behaviour.

One of the major findings of the study is the significant role played by awareness programmes in transforming community attitudes toward Harithakarma Sena workers. Participants consistently reported that public awareness initiatives focusing on waste segregation, environmental cleanliness, sanitation, and public health have contributed to positive changes in the behaviour of community members. Through regular awareness classes, household visits, campaigns, and direct interaction with residents, people have gradually developed a better understanding of the importance of proper waste management and the contribution of Harithakarma Sena workers.

The findings reveal that, in the initial stages, many community members were reluctant to cooperate with workers, failed to segregate waste properly, and often displayed negative attitudes toward waste management activities. However, continuous awareness efforts helped reduce misconceptions and increased public understanding of the environmental and health consequences of improper waste disposal. As a result, many households became more willing to segregate waste, pay user fees, and cooperate with workers during waste collection.

Participants also observed that awareness programmes contributed to improving the social image of Harithakarma Sena workers. As people became more informed about the importance of waste management, they began to appreciate the role of workers in maintaining community cleanliness and public health. This led to greater acceptance, improved communication, and increased respect from many members of the community.

The findings suggest that behavioural change is a gradual process that requires sustained education and continuous engagement with the public. Awareness programmes not only improve waste management practices but also serve as an effective tool for reducing social stigma and promoting the dignity of labour. Therefore, strengthening community awareness initiatives remains essential for fostering positive

attitudes toward Harithakarma Sena workers and ensuring the long-term success of decentralized waste management systems.

Formal Recognition Enhancing Identity and Respect

The findings reveal that formal recognition through uniforms and identity cards improved the social identity and public recognition of Harithakarma Sena workers. Respondents reported that people showed greater respect and acceptance when they wore uniforms and official identification cards. This positive change became more visible following the implementation of the Malinya Muktha Nava Keralam Campaign, which increased public awareness regarding waste management and highlighted the important role of Harithakarma Sena workers in maintaining environmental cleanliness. As a result, workers began to be viewed as essential contributors to community development rather than merely waste collectors. The campaign strengthened their occupational identity, enhanced their sense of dignity, and contributed to greater social acceptance and recognition within the community.

Persistent Structural and Work-Related Challenges

Despite improvements in social attitudes, respondents continue to face several structural challenges. Improper waste segregation, delayed user-fee payments, lack of public cooperation, and inadequate institutional support remain significant concerns. Workers reported that households often provide mixed and unclean waste despite repeated awareness efforts. These findings indicate that practical challenges in waste management continue to affect workers' daily experiences and contribute to occupational stress. The persistence of such issues suggests the need for stronger policy implementation and community participation.

Economic Independence as Empowerment

The findings reveal that Harithakarma Sena provides an important source of livelihood and empowerment for women workers. According to Empowerment Theory, access to economic resources enhances an individual's ability to exercise control over their life and make independent decisions. Respondents explained that income from Harithakarma Sena enabled them to support their families, meet household expenses, and reduce financial dependence on others. Financial independence also improved their confidence, self-worth, and social participation. The findings therefore demonstrate that

employment functions not only as a source of income but also as a means of empowerment and social inclusion for women.

Passive Coping Strategies and Silent Resistance

The study found that workers mainly use passive coping strategies to deal with stigma and workplace challenges. Many respondents preferred to avoid arguments, remain calm, and continue their work despite experiencing disrespect. These coping mechanisms helped them manage emotional stress and maintain their commitment to work. The findings also indicate limited opportunities for workers to directly challenge discriminatory attitudes. Their silent resistance reflects both resilience and the unequal power relations that continue to shape their experiences.

The findings support Goffman's Stigma Theory by demonstrating how occupational stigma continues to influence the social experiences of Harithakarma Sena workers despite improvements in public attitudes. At the same time, the findings support Empowerment Theory by showing how employment and financial independence enhance confidence, self-worth, and social participation among women workers. The study highlights the complex relationship between stigma, gender, awareness, empowerment, and occupational identity in shaping the lived experiences of Harithakarma Sena workers.

5.2.17 SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS

Social Work Practice: The findings reveal that Harithakarma Sena workers continue to experience social stigma, emotional distress, and negative societal attitudes despite their important contribution to environmental cleanliness. This highlights the need for professional social work interventions aimed at enhancing workers' psychosocial well-being. Social workers can provide counselling, emotional support, and resilience-building programmes to help workers cope with the psychological effects of stigma. Through individual and group interventions, social workers can strengthen self-esteem, promote positive self-identity, and support workers in overcoming the emotional consequences of discrimination and social exclusion.

Community Organization and Awareness: The study found that awareness programmes played a significant role in improving public attitudes and increasing

community acceptance of Harithakarma Sena workers. This demonstrates the importance of community-based interventions in addressing social stigma. Social workers can organize awareness campaigns, community meetings, educational programmes, and participatory activities that promote respect for sanitation workers and encourage responsible waste management practices. Such interventions can help challenge stereotypes, reduce discriminatory attitudes, and foster stronger relationships between workers and community members.

Women Empowerment: The findings indicate that although women workers experience occupational stigma and various work-related challenges, employment in Harithakarma Sena has enabled them to achieve a degree of financial independence and self-confidence. This highlights the role of social work in promoting women's empowerment through economic and social inclusion. Social workers can support women workers by facilitating access to skill development programmes, leadership opportunities, self-help groups, and empowerment initiatives. Such efforts can enhance their capacity to participate in decision-making processes, strengthen their social status, and improve their overall quality of life.

Social Action and Advocacy: The study identified persistent challenges such as occupational stigma, delayed user-fee payments, improper waste segregation, and health-related concerns. These findings emphasize the need for social action and advocacy to protect the rights and dignity of Harithakarma Sena workers. Social workers can advocate for fair wages, improved working conditions, occupational safety measures, and welfare benefits. Advocacy efforts can also focus on ensuring greater public recognition of workers' contributions and promoting policies that address discrimination and social exclusion.

Policy and Welfare Interventions: The findings reveal that workers continue to face health risks, financial insecurity, and inadequate institutional support. These issues point to the need for stronger welfare and policy interventions. Social workers can collaborate with local self-government institutions, Suchitwa Mission, and other stakeholders to develop worker-friendly policies and welfare programmes. Particular attention should be given to regular health check-ups, health insurance coverage, safety equipment, social security benefits, and mechanisms for addressing workplace

grievances. Such interventions can contribute to improving the overall well-being and occupational security of Haritha karma Sena workers.

Social Work Research: The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on occupational stigma and the lived experiences of sanitation workers. It highlights the need for further social work research on issues related to stigma, worker well-being, gender, occupational health, and community attitudes. Future studies can explore the experiences of Harithakarma Sena workers in different regions and examine the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce stigma and improve worker welfare.

5.3 SUGGESTION

5.3.1 Suggestions for Harithakarma Sena Workers

- Workers should actively participate in training programmes on waste management, occupational safety, and public communication.
- Harithakarma Sena members should strengthen teamwork and mutual support to address workplace challenges collectively.
- Workers should report safety concerns, harassment, and health issues to the concerned authorities promptly.
- Workers should continue engaging in awareness activities to improve public understanding of their work.
- Members should be encouraged to participate in leadership and capacity-building programmes.
- Workers should make effective use of welfare schemes and health services available to them.

5.3.2 Local Self-Government Institutions

- Regular health screening camps should be organized for Harithakarma Sena workers.
- Health insurance, accident insurance, and pension schemes should be strengthened.

- Adequate safety equipment such as gloves, masks, uniforms, and footwear should be provided regularly.
- Minimum wage and income security measures should be ensured.
- Timely payment systems should be introduced to avoid financial insecurity.
- Stronger waste segregation regulations should be implemented and monitored.
- Recognition programmes and awards should be introduced to acknowledge workers' contributions.
- Dedicated grievance redressal mechanisms should be established.
- Gender-sensitive policies should be developed to address the specific needs of women workers.
- More employment and skill-development opportunities should be provided.

5.3.3 Suggestions for Households

- Households should strictly follow waste segregation practices at source.
- User fees should be paid regularly and without delay.
- Families should cooperate with workers during waste collection.
- Households should avoid discriminatory attitudes and treat workers with respect.
- Residents should follow the waste management guidelines provided by local authorities.
- Families should participate in awareness programmes related to waste management.
- Household members should recognize the health and environmental benefits of the services provided by Harithakarma Sena workers.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The present study, **“Experiences of Social Stigma among Haritha Karma Sena Members in Thiruvananthapuram,”** explored the lived experiences of Haritha Karma Sena (HKS) workers and examined how social stigma influences their occupational, social, and personal lives. The findings reveal that although HKS members play a crucial role in maintaining environmental cleanliness and public health, they continue to face various forms of social stigma due to the nature of their work.

The study found that many workers experienced disrespectful comments, negative labeling, social avoidance, and a lack of recognition, particularly during the initial years of their work. Several respondents reported being referred to as “waste collectors” or “scrap collectors” in a derogatory manner, while some faced rude behaviour from community members during waste collection. These experiences affected their emotional well-being and self-esteem, especially in the beginning stages of their employment.

Gender also influenced the experiences of stigma. Since most Haritha Karma Sena workers are women, they encountered additional challenges related to safety, social attitudes, and the physical demands of the job. Some participants reported facing negative comments and feeling vulnerable while carrying out door-to-door waste collection activities. However, despite these difficulties, the women demonstrated resilience and commitment to their work.

The findings further indicate that social stigma has gradually reduced over time due to increased public awareness regarding waste management, environmental protection, and public health. Awareness campaigns, community interactions, the use of uniforms and identity cards, and the growing acceptance of decentralized waste management have contributed to improved social recognition. Many respondents stated that people now show greater respect and cooperation than in the past.

The study also highlighted several work-related challenges, including improper waste segregation by households, delayed payment of user fees, occupational health risks, inadequate welfare support, and financial insecurity. Despite these challenges, participants expressed a strong sense of pride in their contribution to society. They

viewed their work as a valuable public service that promotes cleanliness, environmental sustainability, and community well-being.

Another significant finding is that employment in Haritha Karma Sena has contributed to the economic empowerment of many women. The income earned through this work has enabled them to support their families, achieve financial independence, and improve their confidence and self-worth. The workers demonstrated positive coping strategies by remaining patient, avoiding conflicts, and continuing their work despite negative experiences.

In conclusion, while social stigma toward Haritha Karma Sena workers continues to exist in certain forms, there has been a noticeable positive shift in public attitudes. The study emphasizes the need for greater social recognition, improved worker welfare measures, enhanced safety provisions, and continued awareness programmes to further reduce stigma and strengthen the dignity of labour. Recognizing and valuing the contribution of Haritha Karma Sena workers is essential not only for their well-being but also for the sustainability of community-based waste management systems in Kerala.

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ANNEXURE

INTERVIEW GUID

➤ **Basic information**

1. Name:
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Marital Status
5. Educational Qualification
6. Monthly Household Income (Approximate)
7. Place of Residence
8. Years of Experience in Haritha karma Sena
9. Are you the Primary Earning Member of the Family?

➤ **Experience of social stigma**

10. How do people in the community treat you while you are doing your work?
11. Have you ever felt disrespected because of your job? Can you explain?
12. Can you share any incident where someone behaved negatively towards you?
13. Do people speak politely to you during waste collection?

➤ **Community attitude & behaviour.**

14. Do households cooperate with you in waste segregation?
15. Have you faced refusal, arguments, or delay in user fee payment?
16. How do neighbours treat you outside your work?

➤ **Gender and stigma**

17. Do you think women face more difficulty in this job? Why?
18. Have you received any comments because you are a woman doing this work?
19. Do you feel safe while going house to house?

➤ **Impact of stigma (personal & family life)**

20. Has this job affected your personal or social life
21. Have your family members or children faced teasing or embarrassment?
22. How do negative experiences make you feel emotionally?
23. Has stigma affected your confidence or self-respect?
24. Do you feel society values your contribution to cleanliness?
25. What does dignity mean to you in this job?

➤ **Formal Recognition and Respect**

- 26. Does wearing a uniform change how people treat you?
- 27. Does having an ID card improve your respect in society?
- 28. Do you feel recognized as a government worker?
- 29. Has formal recognition reduced stigma in your experience?

➤ **Coping strategies**

- 30. How do you respond when someone disrespects you?
- 31. What kind of support do you receive from the government?
- 32. What gives you strength to continue this work?
- 33. Do government uniforms and ID cards make people respect you more?
- 34. Has the government conducted any awareness programmes in your area?
- 35. Do you feel the government values your work?