

Rickshaw Pullers and Their Strategies to Deal with Everyday Conflicts in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

The rickshaw puller community commutes passengers from one place to another, making people's busy lives easy in Dhaka city. While most studies focus on the socio-economic conditions, health hazards and survival techniques of rickshaw pullers, fewer scholarships explore different complexes and conflicts they face daily. Therefore, this paper, developed with primary data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with some permanent and seasonal rickshaw pullers, analyses various conflicts this community faces and strategies they apply to deal with those conflicts. Drawing on Thomas-Kilmann's Conflict Management Model that operationalises five strategies for parties in a conflict situation, it argues that rickshaw pullers mostly choose pragmatic approaches that protect their ontological needs and interests in dealing with everyday conflicts. They face conflicts in four broad aspects (e.g., economic issues, shared space, entry restriction and legal space, and personal space) and engage in conflicts with different actors, including passengers, garage owners, fellow rickshaw pullers, other vehicle drivers, traffic personnel etc., mostly over financial and individual respect issues. Although they consider power dynamics to determine the extent of engagement with the other party, they apply a competitive approach that is mostly used to deal with financial issues. Depending on the power parity of the parties, they show less self-restraint and become assertive in responding to conflicts that originate from disrespect and dishonour to them. However, they preferentially avoid conflicts when the disputing other party is more powerful than them, and avoidance is considered less costly than engaging in disputes. Due to their structural weaknesses and ignorance, rickshaw pullers often accommodate others' demands and collaborate for common benefits. Although they reach an informal compromise through generous negotiation with passengers, garage owners and traffic personnel to balance their interests and needs, a group of other actors approach as third-party peacemakers to settle their violent engagements with other rickshaw pullers on the streets.

Key words: Rickshaw pullers, Conflict, Power dynamics, Dhaka city, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Model.

Introduction

The capital city of Bangladesh, Dhaka, is popularly known as a city of rickshaws. Rapid urbanisation attracts many unemployed people to migrate to this city. The

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majority, if not all, of rickshaw pullers, have migrated for better economic and livelihood opportunities in the destination place as they lack fewer employment opportunities in their rural localities.¹ They face fewer barriers to entering into this informal job market but see more potential to generate quick income.² Rickshaw plays a vital role in the transportation system, providing affordable and convenient means of travel for many lower-income and lower-middle-income group people.³ As a transportation system, it has made their lives easier than other vehicles because of its economic cost-effectiveness and has been contributing to the informal economy.⁴ Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies data shows that around 2.2 million rickshaw pullers live in Dhaka.⁵ They undoubtedly face serious competition for having passengers, but they earn less money compared to their hard work and suffer from physical and mental exhaustion.⁶ They also encounter legal challenges, leading to fines and confiscation of rickshaws.⁷ Sometimes, disputes arise with vehicle drivers, such as bus and car drivers, who compete for road space and often engage in aggressive driving behaviours toward rickshaw pullers.⁸ Some other academic scholarship on rickshaw pullers shows that the majority of them have dealt with their rural-to-urban migration, health issues, some basic survival techniques, etc.

¹ A. Prins and S. Dasgupta, 'Shifting peripheries: Dhaka's rickshaw garages and mess dormitories as spaces of work and movement', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2023; M. N. I. Nazem, 'Rural-urban interaction in Bangladesh: a study of linkages between villages and small urban centres', 1994.

² Y. Hossain, 'Informal Sector and Economic Growth in Bangladesh', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied and Basic Subjects*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 2021, pp. 48-61.

³ M. Hossain, et al., 'Socio-economic Survey of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka, Bangladesh', *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2019, pp. 1-7; A.H.R. Hasan, 'Internal Migration and Employment in Bangladesh: An Economic Evaluation of Rickshaw Pulling in Dhaka City'; R. Verma, et al. (eds.), *Internal Migration, Urbanization and Poverty in Asia: Dynamics and Interrelationships*, Singapore: ADB and Springer, 2022, pp. 339-357.

⁴ S. Begum and B. Sen, 'Pulling rickshaws in the city of Dhaka: A way out of poverty?' *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.17, No. 2, 2005, pp. 11-25; Karim, M. R. and K. A. Salam, 'Organizing the Informal Economy Workers: A BILS Study of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City,' *Labour: A BILS Journal*, 2019, pp. 9-19.

⁵ G. Jibon, "Rickshaws crowd in Dhaka", *The Asian Age Online, Bangladesh*, (January), 2017. <https://dailyasianage.com/news/44208/rickshaws-crowd-dhaka>

⁶ S. N. Wadood and M. Tehsum, 'Examining Vulnerabilities: The Cycle Rickshaw Pullers of Dhaka City'. *International Journal of Development Research*, 2018, pp. 8.

⁷ S. M. Mahmud and M. Hoque, 'Management of Rickshaw in Dhaka City for Ensuing Desirable Mobility and Sustainability: The Problems and Options.' *Conference CODATU XV « The role of urban mobility in (re)shaping cities- Addis Ababa; Ethiopia*, (October), 2012. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345472109_Management_of_Rickshaw_in_Dhaka_a_City_for_Ensuing_Desirable_Mobility_and_Sustainability_The_Problems_and_Options

⁸ M. M. Rahman and M. Assadekjaman 'Rickshaw Pullers and the Cycle of Unsustainability in Dhaka City.' *Transfers*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2013, pp. 99-118.

There is a dearth of academic scholarship on understanding conflicts rickshaw pullers face in Dhaka city and the strategies and approaches they apply to deal with those everyday conflicts. Therefore, this paper, developed with primary data collected through interviews and group discussions with rickshaw pullers, explores understanding the nature of conflicts they face and strategies they apply to manage those conflicts. Hence, it sets a research question—how do rickshaw pullers approach to deal with their everyday conflicts in Dhaka? By answering this question, it contributes to conflict management literature. Drawing on a conflict-handling model developed by Thomas and Kilmann, it argues that rickshaw pullers undertake pragmatic approaches and strategies that benefit them most in meeting their ontological needs and interests. Depending on the nature and issue of the conflicts, they decide whether to engage or avoid serious conflict processes to protect their interests. However, they consider their power and authority while engaging in a competitive or assertive mode in responding to conflict scenarios, evolved with different actors, such as passengers, fellow rickshaw pullers, and other vehicle drivers etc., when they have power parity with the other party, they engage in a competitive process. When they have power asymmetry, especially when they consider them less powerful than the other party, they tend to avoid assertive engagement as avoiding a tussle benefits them most. Under some circumstances, they collaborate when they consider collaboration is more profitable than engaging in disagreements and tussles. Compromise is not rare in their approaches. They are often considered less powerful due to their socio-economic condition and ignorance of the terms and conditions of driving rickshaws in certain areas. Nonetheless, when they compromise, they do it for the economic and other benefits that help them meet their survival needs and interests.

In the following section, this paper includes a brief literature review to identify a research gap and subsequently discusses the research methodology applied to this study. Thereafter, it sets a framework for understanding conflict and a conflict-handling model developed by Thomas and Killman, which is eloquently explained and enriched by others. The next section presents the key findings which are discussed in two relevant sub-sections. One deals with the nature and pattern of various conflicts rickshaw pullers face in everyday life with different actors. The other explores and analyses different strategies and approaches they apply to deal with those conflicts. Thereafter, it includes a brief discussion section that explains the relevance of the model in analysing the nature of conflicts and strategies rickshaw pullers apply in dealing with those conflicts in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted on rickshaw pullers who drive rickshaws in urban cities like Dhaka, Delhi and Ranchi. Many have emphasised rural-to-urban migration and investigated the impoverisher's migratory patterns, causes, and consequences of the rural-to-urban migration, including their vulnerabilities at the destination place. Rickshaw pullers are mainly migrant workers, driven by their rural socio-economic conditions, and are marginalised and economically disadvantaged in different conditions.⁹ A semi-structured questionnaire survey identified major factors that influence an individual's decision to migrate and examined various push (e.g., loss of lands, river erosion, loan repayment, and low wages) and pull (e.g., better job facilities, better wages, and education and better future for their children) factors that play substantive roles in their decision to migrate from rural to urban areas and land in urban slums. Although economic factors dominate their decisions more than environmental and social factors, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish among them as they are all highly interconnected.¹⁰ However, there are various patterns of migration, such as permanent migration, temporary migration, seasonal migration, circular migration, and commuting regularly.¹¹ Begum and Sen identified them as temporary, seasonal, and circular migrations in Dhaka, which have been on the rise and contributing to rapid urbanisation.¹²

De Haan, referring to Indian urbanisation, argued that inequality, not poverty, may be a driving force behind migration, which matches Kumar's findings that the 'economic adversary' of socio-economic deprived sections of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal forced them to leave a place of origin and migrate to Delhi for opting for cycle rickshaw pulling.¹³ Both family connections and marriage also motivate urban

⁹ K. M. Islam and M. A. Baten, 'Climate change induced migration: The case of Bangladesh Exploring dynamics of internal migration to slums of Dhaka city in Bangladesh: A study on drivers and factors', 2017. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312130511>.

¹⁰ N. Islam, 'Urbanisation, Migration and Development in Bangladesh: Recent Trends and Emerging Issues', *UNFPA-CPD Publication Series*, Vol.1, 2018, pp. 4–20.

¹¹ K. Russell, 'Theories and Typologies of Migration: An Overview and A Primer', Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic Relations', *Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM)*, Sweden, Vol. 3 No. 12, 2012, pp.1-43; A. Q. M. Mahbub, 'Mobility behaviour of working people in Bangladesh: rural-rural and rural-urban circulation', 1997.

¹² S. Begum and B. Sen, 'Unsustainable Livelihoods, Health Shocks and Urban Chronic Poverty: Rickshaw Pullers as a Case Study', *Programme for Research on Chronic Poverty in Bangladesh and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka*, Workingpaper No. 46, 2004.

¹³ A. De Haan, 'Rural-urban migration and poverty: The case of India' *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1997, pp. 35–47; N. Kumar, 'Marginalization, Migration and Urban Informal Sector –In-Depth Analysis of Cycle Rickshaw Pullers in Delhi' in Raosaheb K. Kale and Sanghmitra S. Acharya

migration, but easy access to urban cities through better and quicker transportation systems has a role in convincing them to migrate.¹⁴ Other issues like drought, river erosion and flooding also force poor people, mostly from Mymensingh, Rangpur and Barisal—which are collectively termed as ‘poor pockets’ of the nation, to migrate and join in cycle rickshaw pulling at Dhaka city.¹⁵ Whether they are literate or illiterate, rural migrants carry their rural skills with them, which sometimes prove irrelevant but are most often inadequate to survive in urban cities like Dhaka.¹⁶ Once they migrate to Dhaka, rickshaw pulling becomes one of the most prominent informal professions for those unskilled migrated male persons.¹⁷

The majority of rickshaw pullers are rural migrants who, when they move to the city, abandon their former rural employment to increase their income and enhance living standards.¹⁸ Therefore, they end up in this labour-intensive job because of its easy entry requirements, cash compensation, and straightforward standards of behaviour.¹⁹ A study that used survey data of rickshaw pullers from five chosen Dhaka neighbourhoods found that agriculturally engaged peasants migrate to Dhaka to pull rickshaws during the off-season when they do not have much to work in an agricultural field. Thus, these seasonal, temporarily migrated rickshaw pullers create a diversified income portfolio. The remaining rickshaw pullers are considered regular, full-time employees living permanently in different slum areas.²⁰

Besides other issues like environmental issues, unemployment and lack of skills, peer networks and pressure convince those migrated persons to join the labour-intensive, informal cycle rickshaw-pulling sector.²¹ For those migrated people, rickshaw pulling

(eds.) *Mapping Identity-Induced Marginalisation in India: Inclusion and Access in the Land of Unequal Opportunities*, Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2022, pp. 289-300.

¹⁴ N. Islam, *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ S. Begum and B. Sen, *Op. cit.*, 2004, p.7.

¹⁶ N. Islam, *Op. cit.*

¹⁷ Siddiqui *et. al.*, ‘The Informal Sector Poor of Dhaka City’, in K. Siddiqui (Eds.), *Social Formation of the Dhaka City: A Study in Third World Urban Sociology*, University Press Ltd, Dhaka, 1990; S. Begum and B. Sen. ‘Pulling Rickshaws in the City of Dhaka: A Way Out of Poverty?’, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2005, pp. 11-26.

¹⁸ S. Begum and B. Sen, *Op. cit.*, 2004, 2005; M. Tamanna and M.K. Hasan, ‘Life in a Megacity: Livelihood Strategies and Survival Mechanisms of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City’, *Millennial Asia*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2015, pp. 44-60.

¹⁹ Rahman and Assadekjaman, *Op. cit.*

²⁰ S. M. Mahmud and M. Hoque, ‘Management of Rickshaw in Dhaka City for Ensuing Desirable Mobility and Sustainability: The Problems and Options’. *Conference CODATU XV, The role of urban mobility in (re)shaping cities, Addis Ababa; Ethiopia*, (October), 2012.

²¹ S. Begum and B. Sen, *Op. cit.*, 2005; R. Reuveny, ‘Climate Change Induced Migration and Violent Conflict’, *Political Geography*, Vol. 26, No.6, 2007, pp. 656.

has become an incentive and a means of subsistence. Nevertheless, they do not develop a habit of saving money regularly due to a lack of access to financial institutions and services, which are limited by their lack of identity-proof documents, illiteracy and mistrust, as found in a study conducted on rickshaw pullers of Ranchi city, Jharkhand, India.²² Wadood and Tehsum considered rickshaw pullers' social, financial, and physical constraints, shocks and vulnerabilities.²³ As they lack the education and skills necessary to obtain jobs or generate income to survive in urban settings, many continue to stay in difficult situations in metropolitan areas.²⁴ Referring to cycle rickshaws in Delhi, Taparia argued that although rickshaw pullers rely more on 'social capital for entry and operations' in a rickshaw renting industry than other factors, there are complexities in policy regulations that establish control of the owners over the pullers, which ultimately led to rent-seeking behaviour of the former.²⁵ Rickshaw pullers in Dhaka, however, become the victim of the deceptive nature of rickshaw stealing to which an industry of inter-connected 'thief plates' is related that maintains a relation with the rickshaw owners to recover the stolen rickshaw.²⁶

Some studies emphasise the health and well-being conditions of rickshaw pullers in Dhaka and Ranchi and argue that as a marginalised and excluded population, they cannot pay much attention to accessing health facilities due to various structural issues including poverty, negligence, illiteracy, lack of awareness etc.,²⁷ while others examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their life, mental health and livelihood patterns.²⁸ Referring to Lucknow city, a study found that the Covid-19 pandemic

²² A. Kumar, 'Income and Saving Habits among Rickshaw Pullers in Ranchi', *Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2017, pp. 7197-7209.

²³ S.N. Wadood and M. Tehsum, 'Examining Vulnerabilities: The Cycle Rickshaw Pullers of Dhaka City', *Forthcoming in: International Journal of Development Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (January) 2018.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ S. Taparia, 'Institutions and Informal Livelihoods: A Case of Cycle Rickshaw Pullers in Delhi', 2012, DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2371012>

²⁶ B. Suykens and A. Islam, 'Thief Plates: The Mediation of Extortion in the Rickshaw Business in Dhaka, Bangladesh', *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2022, pp. 451-464.

²⁷ Q. M. Rahman, 'Perception regarding Health and Barriers to Seeking Healthcare Services among Rural Rickshaw Pullers in Bangladesh: A Qualitative Exploration,' *Heliyon*, 2022; M. S. Islam *et al.*, 'Socio-economic Profile and Health Status of Rickshaw Pullers in Rural Bangladesh,' *American Journal of Food Science and Health*, Vol. 2, No.4, 2016, pp. 32-38; A. Kumar *et al.*, 'Health and Social Security Needs of Rickshaw Pullers in Ranchi', *Social Work Public Health*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2016, pp. 246-254.

²⁸ F. Ahmed and R. I. Sifat, 'The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of the Rickshaw-Puller in Bangladesh,' *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, Vol. 26, No. 8, 2021, pp. 782-789; M. T. Talukder *et al.*, 'The Livelihood of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City during Covid-19

brought hardship for rickshaw pullers; as their earnings reduced drastically, they suffered from increased hunger, poverty and low protein intake.²⁹ Nevertheless, rickshaw pullers tend to use their human, social, productive and financial capital to mitigate their vulnerabilities.³⁰ Considering the above review and rickshaw pullers complex livelihood and survival patterns, it seems there has been a dearth of knowledge about how rickshaw pullers handle the conflicts they face in everyday life in Dhaka city to which this paper aims to contribute to the field of conflict management.

Methodology of the Study

This study has applied exploratory qualitative methods so that one meaningfully can understand and use ‘the meaning’ people attach to events they experience.³¹ Therefore, a convenient approach was considered to identify and engage rickshaw drivers in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured Individual In-depth Interviews (IIs), which helped in gathering data systematically. A conversational communication approach kept them engaged in the data collection process and assisted us in understanding interpretative aspects of the data to meet the research objectives.

The study area is located in the Dhaka South City Corporation area. Seasonally migrated and permanently living rickshaw pullers from Dhaka University campus, Shahid Minar area, Azimpur, Kamrangirchar, and Shahid Nagor of Lalbagh participated in this research. Some of these areas have rickshaw garages, and most of these participants drive rickshaws in these localities, making it easier to access them. Twenty-four one-to-one interviews were conducted; amongst them, fourteen had migrated earlier and had been living permanently in Dhaka. The rest were temporarily migrated, seasonal rickshaw pullers, who also migrated from different parts of Bangladesh for a short period (Table 1). A set of open-ended questions was used for the respondents to get their in-depth opinions and insights. They talked freely without any hesitation.

Pandemic: A Social Review,’ *British Journal of Healthcare and Medical Research*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2023, pp. 24-30 ; M. I. Jowarder, ‘Covid-19 Impacts on the Livelihoods and Mental Well-being of Rickshaw Pullers in Bangladesh’, *Indonesian Journal of Innovation and Applied Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2023, pp. 38-44.

²⁹ M. Sen, ‘Post-Covid-19: A Study of Rickshaw Pullers in Lucknow City, Uttar Pradesh, India’, *Journal of Formal and Informal Sectors*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2023, pp. 11-20.

³⁰ M. Tamanna and M.K. Hasan, ‘Life in a Megacity: Livelihood Strategies and Survival Mechanisms of Rickshaw Pullers in Dhaka City,’ *Millennial Asia*, Vol. 6, No.1, 2015, pp. 44-60.

³¹ S.B. Merriam, ‘Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, (2nd edition)’, *Jossey-Bass Publishers*, 1998, pp. 179. <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/3511521>

Table 1: Details of Participating Rickshaw Drivers: Individual In-depth Interviews (IIs).

No.	Age	Migration type	Migration (year)	Home District	Profession at Home	Place of Interview
R-1	42	Permanent	1999	Dinajpur	Small Business	Curzon Hall
R-2	52	Permanent	1988	Sherpur	Cultivation	Curzon Hall
R-3	31	Permanent	2006	Kurigram	Small Business	Curzon Hall
R-4	35	Permanent	2015	Nator	Cultivation	Shaheed Minar Road
R-5	38	Seasonal	2022	Kishorganj	Cultivation	TSC
R-6	42	Permanent	2006	Naogaon	Day labourer	Polashi
R-7	35	Permanent	2012	Jamalpur	Garments worker	Polashi
R-8	58	Permanent	1986	Jamalpur	Fish business	Kamrangirchar
R-9	62	Seasonal	2022	Madaripur	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-10	55	Seasonal	2021	Jashore	Small Business	Kamrangirchar
R-11	45	Permanent	2004	Bhola	Day labourer	Azimpur
R-12	38	Seasonal	2022	Madaripur	Cultivation	Azimpur
R-13	57	Permanent	2009	Madaripur	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-14	46	Permanent	2007	Satkhira	Fish Business	Shaheed Nagor, Lalbagh
R-15	36	Seasonal	2022	Bhola	Small Grocery shop	Lalbagh
R-16	59	Permanent	1997	Barishal	Rickshaw driver	Lalbagh
R-17	63	Permanent	1985	Dinajpur	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-18	54	Seasonal	2021	Barguna	Day labourer	Shaheed Nagor, Lalbagh
R-19	24	Seasonal	2022	Satkhira	Unemployed	Shaheed Nagor, Lalbagh
R-20	37	Seasonal	2022	Jamalpur	Baby-taxi Driver	Azimpur
R-21	68	Permanent	2002	Netrokona	Small Business	Kamrangirchar
R-22	73	Permanent	1986	Munshigonj	Cultivation	Kamrangirchar
R-23	21	Seasonal	2021	Patuakhali	Unemployed	Lalbagh
R-24	42	Seasonal	2022	Bhola	Mohonganj	Kamrangirchar

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Five FGDs were conducted in different garages in Kamrangirchar, Lalbagh, and Azimpur, where both permanent and sessional rickshaw pullers and garage owners or their associates participated (Table 2). A set of guiding themes, developed in line with the research objectives, was used for conducting FGDs wherein participants simply discussed their challenges, conflicts they encountered and approaches they applied for managing such conflicts. Their interactions and discussions were intriguing to

understand the dynamics of their everyday conflicts and strategies they rely on to overcome them.

Table 2: Details of Participants: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Number	Total Participants	Category of Participants	Place of FGD	Time
FGD-1	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Shahid Nagar, Lalbagh	8.15 – 9:30 pm
FGD-2	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Kamrangirchar	9.00 –10:30 pm
FGD-3	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Kamrangirchar	9:30 -11:00 pm
FGD-4	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Azimpur	10:00 - 11:30 pm
FGD-5	7	Rickshaw Puller: 4 Garage Owner / Associates: 3	A Local Garage at Shahid Nagar, Lane 8, Lalbagh	5:00 -6:30 pm

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Besides the primary data collected through IIs and FGDs, this study used secondary data from various sources, including journal articles, books, and reports of different organisations, which were required to answer the research question. However, for analytical purposes, it used the basic understanding of conflicts—the ways it is understood, their core causes and distinctions between violent and non-violent conflicts. It also explored a conflict management model, popularly known as the Thomas-Kilmann model of conflict management, developed by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann.³² This model has immense significance in understanding the approaches and strategies Rickshaw puller—as an individual, who is one of the parties to their everyday conflicts, adopt and apply to deal with such situations.

Understanding Conflict and Approaches to Dealing with Conflicts: A Theoretical Perspective

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life; everyday people experience conflicts of various natures. Scholarly explanations of conflicts are vital in understanding the

³² K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, “Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, (1st ed.)”, *Tuxedo NY: XICOM*, 1974.

interests of the parties, which are at the core of any conflict. Such interests could be personal, political or related to resources, which could be driven by power or status of the parties. The seminal definition Wallensteen used indicates conflict as 'a social situation', wherein 'a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time as available set of scarce resources'.³³ Various tangible and intangible issues and factors contribute to creating a condition of conflict.³⁴ Yet, a conflict begins with misperception and miscommunication, which gradually engulf other socio-economic, political, cultural and identity issues.³⁵ Wallensteen put 'goal incompatibility' at the heart of any existence of a conflict, which indicates an irreconcilable position for parties, meaning they do not want to sacrifice or negotiate as long 'there is some form of scarcity'.³⁶ Putnam and Poole emphasised 'the interaction of interdependent people' who perceive opposing goals, aims or values that arise from the other party.³⁷ Therefore, conflict broadly means nothing but a clash of interests of the parties.

However, not all conflicts are violent; many conflicts remain non-violent. Conflict only becomes violent when parties see a mutually exclusive or controversial incompatibility for which they are prepared to take actions and counter-actions against each other to achieve their objectives.³⁸ There are structural and cognitive aspects that shape parties' responses to a conflict.³⁹ The structural conditions are those that determine parties' strengths, both structural and personal, based on diverse causal factors and forces that set the tone of interactions between the parties.⁴⁰ The cognitive perspective of the parties, however, develops through a directed 'black box', which means the way parties perceive and interpret each other, depending on their behaviours and contextual realities.⁴¹ Therefore, we consider conflict as a social situation that develops on various socio-economic, structural and cognitive conditions that engage two parties with their incompatible goals, which are often related to material or immaterial, intangible values and issues and lead to their behavioural engagements in a conflict process.

³³ P. Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution*, London, 2002, p.16.

³⁴ H. W. Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis*, London, 2008.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ P. Wallensteen, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁷ L. L. Putnam and M.S. Poole, 'Conflict and Negotiation', F. M. Jablin *et. al.* (eds.), "*Handbook of Organizational Communication*", Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987, pp. 549-599.

³⁸ H. W. Jeong, *Op. cit.*

³⁹ K. W. Thomas, 'Conflict and Conflict Management: Reflections and Update', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1992, pp. 265-274.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

When a conflict develops, parties to it apply different strategies and approaches to manage or settle conflicts. These depend on the conflict management skills of the parties and their surrounding environment.⁴² For considering the theoretical perspective of this paper, we explore a widely used conflict-handling model, popularly known as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Model (T-KCMM), which provides a comprehensive understanding of the strategies conflicting parties may apply to deal with the conflict constructively if not violently, depending on their conditions.⁴³

They studied workers and their routine conflicts in their workplace and thus developed this model to explain how parties chose and applied their methods and approaches to address their conflicts through five core modes linked with their strategies. These five modes are broadly linked to two basic 'dimensions' to measure parties' level of 'assertiveness' and 'cooperativeness'/'responsiveness' in conflict situations (Fig. 1).⁴⁴ The degree of assertiveness or cooperativeness can be measured based on strategies parties apply out of five main modes—competition, avoidance, accommodation, collaboration, and compromise, which reflect behavioural exposure of parties (Fig. 1).⁴⁵

In this conflict handling model, parties consider their 'intentions' that Thomas termed as 'strategic intention' to satisfy their own and others' concerns.⁴⁶ When they attempt to satisfy their interests, they apply either avoidance or competition strategy. Measuring assertiveness depends on the extent to which they apply these strategies. When both parties apply the avoidance strategy, a conflict becomes less assertive and less violent. What makes parties to avoid conflict is not always clear. There are three conditions, such as, when the issue of contention is minor, when the parties do not have much information or strategies to deal with a conflict issue effectively and when they have effective means to convince each other, which help parties to avoid a conflict.⁴⁷

⁴² S. Altmäe *et al.*, 'Thomas-Kilmann's Conflict Management Modes and their Relationship to Fiedler's Leadership Styles (based on Estonian Organizations)', *Baltic Journal of Management*, Vol. 8, No.1, 2013, pp. 45-65.

⁴³ K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, *Op. cit.*, 1974; K. W. Thomas, *Op. cit.*, 1992, p. 266.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; J. R. Darling and W. E. Wlaker, 'Effective Conflict Management: Use of the behavioral Style model', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 5, 2001, p. 232.

⁴⁵ K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 11; K. W. Thomas, *Op. cit.*, 1992, p. 266.

⁴⁶ K. W. Thomas, *Op. cit.*, 1992.

⁴⁷ D. Hellriegel *et al.*, "*Organizational Behavior, (9th ed.)*", South Western College Publisher, Cincinnati, 2000; J. M. Ivancevich, *et al.*, "*Managing conflict and negotiations in Organizational behavior and management*", McGraw-Hill, New York, 2011, pp. 309-338.

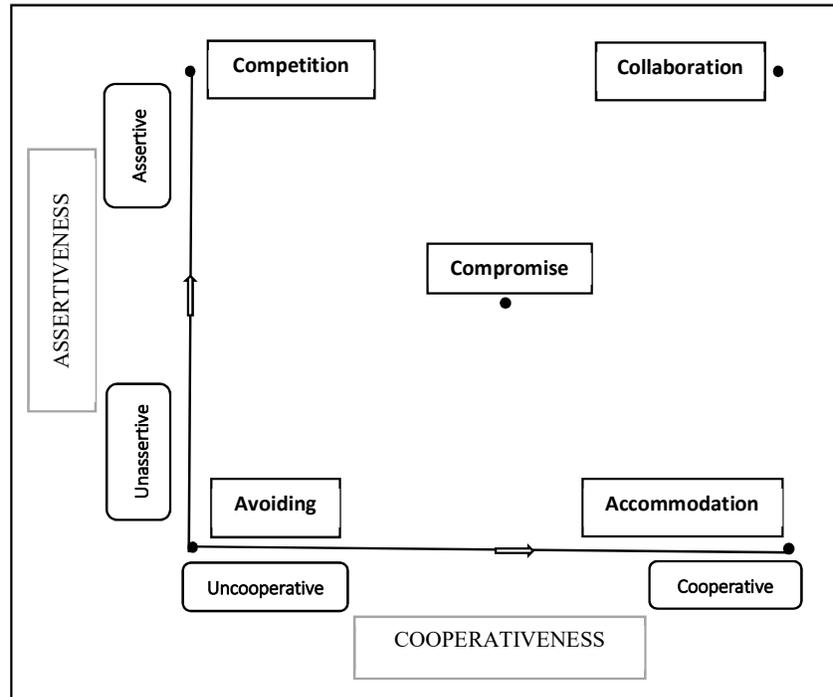


Fig. 1: Two-dimensional taxonomy of conflict-handling modes.

In addition, power asymmetry could influence parties' decisions to avoid conflict too.⁴⁸ Although those who avoid conflicts may be evaluated unfavourably by others, avoidance keeps a conflict low. The party that applies this strategy wants to stay away from the conflict, which helps to keep their tension and frustration low, which is more advantageous than engaging in competitive behaviour. One could consider it as an uncooperative behaviour of the parties; yet, when both parties pay attention to avoidance, they cooperate and keep the assertiveness level low, meaning they do not like to take the conflict to a violent level.

Conversely, parties enter into a competition mode when they have non-sacrificing attitudes towards their goals. Through competition, they want a win-lose outcome and apply every means, like resorting to violent means of any kind, including aggressive

⁴⁸ F. Luthans, "Conflict and Stress in Organizational Behavior", McGraw-Hill International Book Company, Auckland, 1981, pp. 365–385.

behaviour, verbal attacks and threats, if not physical assaults.⁴⁹ It is highly assertive mode, meaning the chance of cooperation is low. Parties want to establish dominance over the other and maintain a high priority on their interest at the cost of others.⁵⁰ Their winning attitudes invite violence to defend their rights, position and incompatible objectives for which they engage in conflict with persuasion, arguments and assertive communication.⁵¹ To avoid assertiveness, the weaker party may not engage in violence, while the stronger party may want a quick outcome of the conflict through competition.

The second approach, cooperativeness or responsiveness of the parties, is more complicated than assertiveness as long as it pays attention to understanding another party's position, demand, and feelings.⁵² Once parties believe that the other party also has its legitimate demand, it could open up a discussion channel between them. The more collaborative and accommodating they are to the needs of the other party, the easier it is to manage the conflict. However, an accommodation method opposes the competition mode but pays maximum attention to satisfying the other party's needs.⁵³ Therefore, it invites cooperative, non-assertive and generous behaviour of the parties who do not want to engage in fights. This helps to maintain a positive relationship between them, as they care for each other. Nevertheless, a collaborative mode is more reasonable than an accommodative style because the former emphasises a joint problem-solving approach and tries to find common grounds to reach an informal or formal agreement that maximises a result by striking a balance between the needs and interests of the parties, which benefits them collectively.⁵⁴ Although the collaborative mode seeks to agree with the adversary to reach an outcome for a collective cause, reaching that stage depends on various issues, such as appreciating the tendency of the parties and their mutual trust that protects their interests together.⁵⁵

The core of this conflict management model is 'compromise', a central point of assertiveness and cooperativeness of parties. This compromise mode allows parties to make a proportional sacrifice through 'give and take', meaning both parties achieve something at the cost of giving up something.⁵⁶ Parties can take support of negotiation

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ D. Hellriegel, J. W. Slocum and R.W. Woodman, *Op. cit.*

⁵¹ K. W. Thomas and R. H. Kilmann, *Op. cit.*, 1974.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ J. M. Ivancevich, J. L. Gibson and R. Konopaske, *Op. cit.*, 2011.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ D. Hellriegel, J.W. Slocum, and R.W. Woodman *Op. cit.*, 2000.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and/or mediation services to reach a consensus that evolves through intensive discussion and bargaining.⁵⁷ When parties or individuals focus on compromise, they look into ‘a fair combination of gains and losses for both parties’.⁵⁸ Although this is a ‘win-win’ situation for parties that help them halt violent behaviour, they may have to give up more than gain to pursue cooperativeness. Since compromise does not find a distinct ‘winner or loser’; therefore, it may not be an ideal outcome for fully achieving their incompatible goal.⁵⁹ Therefore, Luthans considered it as a ‘lose-lose approach’ to conflict management because both parties would lose something to settle the dispute.⁶⁰

This broadly defined framework provides a theoretical perspective on a conflict that is nothing but a clash of interests of involved parties, which can undertake any of the five strategies—avoidance, competition, accommodation, collaboration and compromise, as the T-KCMM depicts, to deal with such a conflict situation. They apply any of these strategies to pursue their goals and satisfy their needs. They sacrifice something to achieve a consensus that benefits both parties, which could be a ‘win-win’ or mixed victory for the parties. Although this conflict management framework was developed to study workers and their routine conflicts during the 1970s, it has helped numerous people including workers and labourers in different settings, understand and analyse their strategies in responding to conflict situations. Therefore, this attractive model of handling conflicts has been taken into account for exploring the strategies and approaches rickshaw pullers in Dhaka city consider to deal with their everyday conflicts. Nevertheless, their power dynamics and other contextual factors determine the strategies that individuals, groups, or communities apply to deal with a conflict.

Research Findings: Rickshaw Pullers’ Conflicts and Strategies to Handle Them

Rickshaw pullers, who live either permanently or arrive seasonally, help people commute from one place to another and make people’s lives easy as much as possible. Various tangible and intangible issues create conditions for evolving conflicts in their daily lives. This section presents key findings of this study, related to different patterns of conflicts rickshaw pullers experience every day and strategies they apply to handle them.

Nature of Rickshaw Pullers Conflict in Dhaka City

Although rickshaw pullers face various conflicts on tangible and intangible issues, most of their conflicts are non-violent, except for some occasional violent engagement

⁵⁷ F. Luthans, *Op. cit.*, 1981.

⁵⁸ D. Hellriegel, J. W. Slocum and R. W. Woodman *Op. cit.*, 2000.

⁵⁹ J. M. Ivancevich, J. L. Gibson and R. Konopaske, *Op. cit.*, 2011.

⁶⁰ F. Luthans, *Op. cit.*, 1981.

with fellow rickshaw pullers and on rare occasions with the passengers. Their patterns of conflict depend on the nature and power dynamics of different actors involved in those conflicts which evolve when their interests clash with other parties. Actors with whom rickshaw pullers clashing interests develop may come from different backgrounds, having links to diverse powerful networks and connections. We have divided the nature of their conflicts into four categories: financial aspect, shared space, legal space and personal space.

Financial Issues

One of the main reasons for rickshaw pullers to come to Dhaka city is to earn money and gain some kind of financial solvency for their families. Such financial solvency is expected by them to overcome the unemployment, poverty, and debt that they carry on from their localities. Therefore, whatever rickshaw pullers earn through fares from the customers is their main income, which they want to protect. Their charges from the customers are determined by their time, distance of the trip, demand of the trip, and their mutual negotiation capabilities. Therefore, their income is a precious aspect of their daily life. They sometimes experience conflicts on financial issues with the passenger(s) and garage owners, especially when they bargain for a reasonable fare with passengers or when they are unable to pay daily rent to garage owners.

Conflict with Passenger(s)

Conflict between passenger(s) and rickshaw pullers is not an uncommon phenomenon on Dhaka's streets. Such conflicts primarily evolve from different expectations, disagreement over fares, misunderstandings and communication barriers. Some respondents mentioned in their interviews that they often face conflicts over the fares with passengers. It is not an issue of negotiated fare; when they have a negotiated fare that does not lead to conflict. Nevertheless, fair negotiation could be a matter of conflict and could generate heated debate between them. Passengers try to bargain for lower fares, whereas rickshaw pullers resist lowering their rates. As both parties try to assert their position on fare, disagreements over it occasionally lead to heated arguments and conflicts.⁶¹ Since rickshaw pullers are migrated people in the urban city and belong to a marginalised community due to their power disparity, they often face verbal abuse and sometimes experience physical assaults, when arguments develop.

Such a verbal quarrel or physical assault takes place when they fail to negotiate a fare with the passenger. While in a rush, some passengers do not give space to the rickshaw pullers to negotiate the price for a ride, but force them to drive to a directed destination

⁶¹ Participants of FGD-1 highlighted these issues on 11 November, 2022.

place. The problem arises when the passenger pays a lower fare than the expectation of the rickshaw puller. The distance they cross may have a high fare which the passenger does not want to pay. The time and labour a rickshaw puller spends and exhausts for that ride do not compensate by a low fare. When both parties show their rigidity that develops a situation of conflict—with arguments, counter-arguments and quarrels, which sometimes lead to physical assaults. Some passengers assault the rickshaw puller physically, which the latter could not prevent due to their lack of power in the urban city.⁶² Nevertheless, some young rickshaw pullers counter the passenger with counter-assault which makes the situation worse for both parties. Such acts of violence not only endanger their physical safety but also instil fear and anxiety, making their daily lives more difficult, especially when they get seriously injured.

Due to the complex road network and frequent traffic congestion in Dhaka City, passengers and Rickshaw pullers may develop misunderstandings over the route of the journey. Passengers expect rickshaw pullers to take a specific route, while the rickshaw puller opts for alternative routes to avoid traffic congestion or roadblocks. Such disagreements over the route sometimes lead to verbal abuse of the rickshaw puller as the passengers feel that they are being taken on unnecessary detours or rickshaw pullers face accusations of intentionally prolonging the journey, perhaps for extra fares.⁶³

We found a significant portion of the respondents faced physical assault by passengers. A rickshaw puller who used to pull a rickshaw in the Mirpur area expressed how he was harassed and assaulted by a passenger. He stated:

I am forty-two years old and an illiterate Rickshaw Puller. I have been living here in Mirpur for at least 18 years I have been engaged in this profession with a lot of experience. One day, I was taking a passenger in the Mirpur area, and the road was traffic-jammed. The passenger told me to take the Rickshaw on the footpath. I then said that I am not like other rickshaw pullers and the footpath is not a place for pulling rickshaws. He then slapped me because of not listening to him and left without paying the fare. I immediately fell into that place. There were many people around, but they didn't respond. For a long time, I could hardly hear.⁶⁴

This is not a story of a single rickshaw puller but is a saga of direct and indirect assaults on the rickshaw puller community. Nevertheless, seasonal rickshaw pullers face more assaults than those who permanently live in Dhaka city as the latter group has learnt

⁶² N. Jahan, 'Pulling the Weight of the World: No Services in Sight for the Rickshaw Pullers of the Country', *The Daily Star*, 08 February, 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/labour-rights/news/pulling-the-weight-the-world-1698940>

⁶³ Individual Interview, no 3, 5 and 14, respectively interviewed on August 16 and September 5, 2022; FGD-5, organised at a local garage in Shahid Nagar of Lalbagh on November 17, 2022.

⁶⁴ Individual Interview, no 6, interviewed on August 16, 2022.

how city dwellers behave with them while the former is prone to face more challenges and conflicts as they are less accustomed to the passengers' behaviours.

Conflict and Tussle with Garage Owners

Another aspect of the conflict that rickshaw pullers face with garage owners originates from various issues related to parking, rental payments, rickshaw damage and working conditions.⁶⁵ The relationship between garage owners and rickshaw pullers is generally good but often is characterised by their power imbalance and unequal bargaining power.⁶⁶ When a rickshaw puller delays paying the daily rent due to sickness or other health issues, the owner could ask for money that a puller could not manage to pay. Besides this, when a rickshaw puller loses a rickshaw that could lead to a serious conflict between them. Data from an FGD asserted that when a rickshaw is lost or stolen, the garage owner catches the rickshaw puller and beats him up until his family members come and pay compensation.⁶⁷

Rickshaw pullers are not strong enough in economic, political, or physical power; therefore, the garage owners can exploit them. No new person could rent a rickshaw from any garage, without a known guarantor. They fear losing the rickshaw if it is rented to an unknown puller. Moreover, a garage owner could be rude to a rickshaw puller, especially when a rickshaw is damaged in an accident.⁶⁸ Sometimes, garage owners could suppress them directly or mentally. Many seasonal rickshaw pullers take loans from the garage owners but cannot return the borrowed money in time. When they become defaulter, garage owners become harsh to them and threaten them to repay the money.⁶⁹ However, some respondents also opined that not all garage owners are the same; some allow them more time to repay the money.

Shared Space

Rickshaw pullers shared some space with other fellow rickshaw pullers in rickshaw lanes, with other vehicles in the road and common parking spaces. In these spaces, they experience different patterns of conflicts; in some occasions, they engage in physical violence while in other cases they get into quarrels if not assaults.

Conflict with Vehicle Drivers

Conflicts between vehicle drivers and rickshaw pullers in Dhaka City are pretty common due to the coexistence of different modes of transportation that share the same

⁶⁵ FGD-3, organised at a garage in Kamraggir char area on November 14, 2022.

⁶⁶ FGD-4, organised at a local garage in Azimpur on November 15, 2022.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

⁶⁹ Individual Interview, no 9, interviewed on September 16, 2022

road space. Conflicts arise between them primarily from issues related to traffic congestion, road sharing, accidents and perceived differences in the rights and non-privileges of drivers and rickshaw pullers, respectively. The presence of rickshaws is often considered a source of severe traffic congestion in a mega city like Dhaka. Although not all roads are accessible for rickshaws, where they are allowed creates complexity as vehicles like buses, private cars, human hauliers and laguna, and rickshaws share the same roads. Conflicts arise when vehicle drivers perceive rickshaws hinder traffic flow, leading to frustration and impatient behaviour of the vehicle drivers.⁷⁰ Data also indicate that rickshaw pullers face conflicts when vehicle drivers exhibit aggressive behaviour or refuse to share the road space. They engage in conflicts when the vehicle drivers or rickshaw pullers attempt risky overtaking manoeuvres that endanger their safety and cause potential accidents. Such a manoeuvring brings the vehicles closer to the rickshaw or vice versa, the powerful party, mostly the vehicle (private car, bus or CNG-run auto-rickshaw) driver comes out of the driving seat and sometimes assaults the rickshaw pullers, either verbally or physically, or both. Everyone blames them for accidents and slaps for no or minimal causes.⁷¹

Respondents of an FGD stated that conflicts frequently occur at intersections, where the rights to use the road space are often disputed between vehicle drivers and rickshaw pullers.⁷² Vehicle drivers may disregard the presence of rickshaws and try to assert their rights to use the space, leading to potential collusion, damage and conflicts. A lack of adherence to traffic rules by either of the parties and mutual disrespect for each other exacerbates the conflicts at intersections, which result in verbal abuse and occasionally physical violence. Some respondents argued that extended stay at traffic signals becomes a cause for impatience of the parties and they want to cross the intersection quickly, which leads to inter-vehicle and rickshaw collusion, culminating in heated arguments, insults, and even physical confrontations.

Conflict with Fellow Rickshaw Pullers

Rickshaw pullers commonly engage in conflicts with other fellow rickshaw pullers due to competitive and laborious nature of their work. Primarily, they engage in competition over passenger issues. Secondly, their involvement in violent conflicts often originates from shared road space for driving rickshaws. Filed data indicate that one of the main reasons for conflict between them is the intense competition over

⁷⁰ FGD-3, *Op. cit.*

⁷¹ N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

⁷² FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

having passengers.⁷³ Rickshaw pullers constantly wait in the streets to have passengers during busy times. A sense of conflict develops between them over who gets a particular passenger, especially when passengers have not chosen a specific rickshaw puller. In other words, who will have the passenger creates a competition among them, which could turn into a temporary unhealthy competition. In addition, when a passenger bargains for a fare with a rickshaw puller, but another rickshaw puller suddenly asks for a low fare and invites the passenger to ride on his rickshaw that creates conflicts with temporary arguments.⁷⁴

Conflict also stems from violations of traffic rules and due to a lack of proper road etiquette.⁷⁵ When a rickshaw puller drives recklessly, cuts lanes or does not follow traffic signals, it develops a sense of frustration and anger among some other rickshaw pullers. Respondents of an FGD stated that they frequently get into arguments with other drivers when they hinder their movement, overtake each other, or encroach on their space.⁷⁶ Two or more rickshaw drivers get involved in a collision whilst crossing the road or passing through the circle of the road. This type of conflict starts with each other using slang, which sometimes results in physical fights and injuries. Nevertheless, their physical fights intensify when they use derogatory words and phrases that undermine their mutual respect, position and status.⁷⁷ Such a type of conflict creates traffic congestion on the lanes or streets.

Some respondents mentioned that territorial dispute also takes place among rickshaw drivers.⁷⁸ Certain areas or streets may be (un)officially designated to a particular group of rickshaw pullers, and conflicts may arise when a driver from the outside tries to operate or pick up passengers within that territory.⁷⁹ Mostly the seasonal rickshaw pullers face such challenges in those areas and confront with them whom they do not know. Those who are not from that area are also not aware of certain rules for operating there; therefore, issues develop leading to arguments, if not fights, which make an unhealthy environment for others who operate there.

Conflict with Pedestrians

On some rare occasions, rickshaw pullers and pedestrians get into conflicting interactions. Due to the high population density, limited infrastructure, and chaotic

⁷³ Individual Interview, no 8 and 17, respectively interviewed on September 16 and 24, 2022; FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

⁷⁴ Individual Interview, no 13, interviewed on September 16, 2022.

⁷⁵ FGD-2, arranged in Kamraggir char area on November 13, 2022.

⁷⁶ FGD-5, arranged at Shahid Nagar of Lalbagh area on November 17, 2022.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Individual Interview, no 11, interviewed on September 16, 2022.

traffic conditions in Dhaka, one cannot rule out such a situation between them. Dhaka's streets are often crowded with pedestrians, rickshaws, cars, and other vehicle. Some respondents mentioned that in crowded areas, rickshaw pullers might unintentionally or intentionally encroach on sidewalks or pedestrian pathways due to inadequate designated spaces for parking or waiting.⁸⁰ This encroachment obstructs pedestrian movement and creates uncomfortable situations when pedestrians rightfully argue for their right to walk freely. Pedestrians may confront rickshaw pullers or express dissatisfaction, but rarely do they charge rickshaw pullers.⁸¹ Nevertheless, when pedestrians want to cross a road, even from the zebra crossing which is clogged by huge rickshaw presence, another sense of dissatisfaction grows among them, which may lead them to spare some words towards the rickshaw pullers community.

Entry Restriction and Legal Space

The legal space for a rickshaw puller is connected to issues related to a license or a permit from the municipal authorities and local societies where they operate. Additionally, it is related to how traffic maintenance agencies, like Police and Ansar, treat them on the street, as they are restricted not to entering certain areas. There are claims that rickshaw pullers are often harassed and exploited by corrupt traffic police and Ansar for violating regulations or for no reason at all, as highlighted by some respondents.⁸²

Entrance Restriction and Associated Problems

Rickshaw pullers have restrictions to enter different areas of Dhaka city. According to some respondents, they have restricted or limited access to various areas, such as high-security zones, diplomatic areas, highway roads, and time-restricted streets. These legal obligations limit their mobility in those areas and reduce their income. However, when they try to enter those areas, either willingly or by the influence of the passengers, law enforcement people restrict them from entering those places. Their entrance to those areas is considered unpermitted, if not unlawful. Despite knowing such territorial entrance restrictions, some seasonal rickshaw pullers enter. As a consequence, they not only face entrance challenges but also experience a kind of encounter with the on-duty security person—police or member of the Ansar, who wants to stop them.⁸³

⁸⁰ FGD-5, *Op. cit.*

⁸¹ FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

⁸² Individual Interview, No 2, 5, 8, 11 and 21, respectively interviewed on 13 and 16 August, 16 September and 5 October, 2022; FGD-1, arranged at a local Garage of Shahid Nagar on 11 November, 2022; FGD-5, arranged at Shahid Nagar of Lalbagh area on November 17, 2022; FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

When they enter into those restricted areas by the influence of passengers, it also creates a tussle with the passengers, who often leave the rickshaw pullers once they are in trouble in such a situation. However, some areas have registered rickshaw pullers, meaning without registration no pullers could ride there. When unregistered, seasonal rickshaw pullers enter that area, it could be a source of problems with permanent rickshaw pullers there, as the latter face more competition to get passengers. Moreover, the entrance of non-registered rickshaw pullers into a restricted, registered zone creates problems with local security guards who do not allow them to enter.⁸⁴ In some areas, they dare to enter due to a fear of punishment, such as confiscation of their rickshaws.

Facing Corrupt Traffic Personnel

Rickshaw pullers' conflicts with some on-duty corrupt members of traffic personnel often remain invisible, but do not go unnoticed. Corrupt members may exploit them in different intersections. As a result, rickshaw pullers may quickly bribe a tiny amount to enter a road or area where they do not have access.⁸⁵ For example, when they enter into the main roads during the busy hours. Most of the FGD and interview respondents highlighted that the traffic police harass rickshaw drivers by puncturing rickshaw tyres and confiscating rickshaws. Why they puncture or confiscate rickshaws is a relevant question too. As mentioned before, this sort of conflicting situation evolves when they access roads which are not authorised for rickshaws or when they violate traffic signals and rules.

Some respondents argued that on some occasions traffic police charge them for not having proper licenses, permits, or documentation, even when the rickshaw pullers operate within legal boundaries.⁸⁶ Due to the callousness of some regulatory authorities and the traffic police, rickshaw pullers often find themselves in technically unlawful circumstances as they struggle to earn a livelihood, without knowing appropriate rules for driving rickshaws on busy roads of Dhaka. Some interviewees claimed that corrupt traffic personnel impound rickshaws for no apparent reason and dismantle them if the owner or puller fails to pay the mandatory fine.⁸⁷

Some others mentioned that some corrupt traffic personnel might resort to verbal abuse, intimidation, or physical violence against rickshaw pullers.⁸⁸ It creates a hostile

⁸⁴ Individual Interview, no 8, interviewed on September 16, 2022

⁸⁵ Individual Interview, no 2, 5, 8, 11 and 21, *Op. cit.*, 2022.

⁸⁶ FGD-5, *Op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Individual Interview, No. 2, 8, 9 and 15, respectively interviewed on August 13, September 16 and 24, 2022.

⁸⁸ FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

and unsafe working environment for them, causing physical harm and psychological trauma. Several respondents claimed that the prevalent nature of corruption limits them in seeking justice or reporting incidents of harassment and exploitation to any authority. As rickshaw pullers are not aware of their rights and do not have united unions to protect them against any such exploitation, they fear retaliation and enjoy limited access to legal assistance.⁸⁹ Therefore, harassment and exploitation of corrupt traffic personnel not only challenge their working conditions but also affect their financial stability and overall well-being.

Personal Space

The individual space of rickshaw pullers is complex since they come from diverse backgrounds and different areas, with various localised socio-economic problems. Like other humans, they have dignity and respect which sometimes are violated by the passengers and personnel they encounter in their daily lives on residence and debt issues.

Conflict over Respect and Dignity Issues

Rickshaw pullers who migrate to improve their economic conditions constitute a marginal community in their destination place, as they do not know each other. Despite their economic unprivileged conditions and backwardness, like other human beings, they have dignity and respect. When some passengers and personnel undermine their human values and disrespect them, they encounter conflicting situations. For example, when a passenger asks a rickshaw puller in a degrading way by saying, hey rickshaw will you go? (Ei rickshaw jabi?) that creates a low feeling among them.⁹⁰ This feeling of disrespect becomes a serious issue of dignity when a passenger who is younger than a rickshaw puller asks this with similar tunes. Rickshaw pullers work independently to improve their conditions but do not expect such disregard from city dwellers. Having their humble socio-economic condition does not mean that deserve to be disrespected by anyone. Rickshaw pullers often do not reply to a passenger in the same tune. Had there been any counter-response in similar ways could have escalated a tense situation between them. Nevertheless, many respondents highlighted that when they receive disrespectful words, phrases of slang or sentences from another rickshaw puller during a heated argument, they response similarly which often leads to quarrels and physical fights between them.⁹¹

⁸⁹ N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Individual Interview, no 4, 6 and 19, respectively interviewed on September 16 and October 5, 2022

⁹¹ Ibid.

Conflict over Residence Issues

Data show that many of the rickshaw pullers reside in informal settlements, including crowded accommodation facilities in the rickshaw garage and overcrowded slums, characterised by lack of basic amenities, services and uncertain tenure.⁹² They often lack proper infrastructure, including access to clean water, sanitation facilities, mosquito nets etc., which hamper their quality of life. They cannot manage high-cost alternative, affordable accommodation due to their low income and sending money to their families back home. Nevertheless, they face constant threats of eviction and displacement, when they fail to pay the rent on time in their informal, temporary accommodation space. Nevertheless, a group of rickshaw pullers who participated in FGDs in Kamrangirchar informed that they frequently face conflicts with landowners, developers, or government authorities, who have attention to evict them from these informal dwellings, as those actors want to use those available space for big commercial or residential projects.⁹³ They lack legal contracts for their occupancy which makes them more vulnerable to forceful evictions.

Burdens of Debts

Many rickshaw pullers who come to Dhaka have debts that they incur from various sources, such as garage owners, moneylenders, cooperative societies, and friends or relatives in the native village.⁹⁴ They constantly undergo a conflict situation since they have pressure to repay the money to the lenders. Respondents who have borrowed money at high interest rates expressed that they may have borrowed money to meet their needs or cope with emergencies, they have to repay more than they loaned.⁹⁵ There are strict terms and conditions set by the lenders who exploit them.⁹⁶ The enormous loads of debts back home force some of them to migrate.

Seasonal rickshaw pullers experience more harassment than permanent rickshaw pullers in such a situation. The former borrows money from the village lenders and when become defaulters, they move to urban cities to earn money and repay the money. Sometimes they again borrow money from the garage owners to return money to the village lenders; thus, they are trapped into two lenders that create a psycho-social conflict for them.⁹⁷ However, permanent rickshaw pullers mostly borrow money from

⁹² Individual Interview, No. 9, 10, 18 and 24, respectively interviewed on September 16 and 24, October 11, 2022.

⁹³ FGD-3, *Op. cit.*

⁹⁴ N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Individual Interview, no 22, interviewed on October 5, 2022.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Individual Interview, no 15 and 23, interviewed on September 16 and October 11, 2022.

garage owners on conditions to return quickly. Nevertheless, when a rickshaw puller fails to repay money to the garage owners, they could be barred from getting a rickshaw for pulling and their families may have to undergo harassment.⁹⁸ Thus, the burdens of debt induce tension, frustration, and economic vulnerability among rickshaw pullers.

Strategies Rickshaw Pullers Apply to Deal with Their Conflicts

While rickshaw pullers experience different kinds of conflicts in their daily lives in Dhaka city, they apply various strategies and undertake different approaches to deal with those conflicts. The strategies and approaches they apply to address conflicts are dependent on their socio-economic conditions, and their power parity and disparity with the actors with whom they engage in conflicts. These issues are discussed in line with Thomas-Kilmann's model of handling conflicts.

Prioritised Competition

While the competing mode of a conflict situation is considered a strategy to pursue one's interests at the expense of others, parties use assertive and uncooperative modes that result in a win-lose outcome. Rickshaw pullers in Dhaka city use this mode when they have to defend their rights and interests against the other actors, including the passengers, fellow rickshaw pullers or rickshaw owners. Data shows that rickshaw pullers employ these modes for two purposes: (i) to demand fair fares from the passengers, who may try to evade bargaining, and (ii) to fight, either physically or verbally, with their fellow rickshaw pullers and drivers of other vehicles.

Rickshaw pullers generally bargain peacefully for fares with passengers. However, some participants argued that they may develop a counter-response to passengers who refuse to pay fair payments and abuse them verbally or physically.⁹⁹ This approach applies to resisting harassment of the rough passengers. Nevertheless, rickshaw pullers do not apply this approach when they find serious power disparity with the other party. For instance, the traffic police and Ansar, and garage owners are considered more powerful to them. Therefore, they avoid engaging in aggressive behaviour with them.

Nevertheless, rickshaw pullers show less self-restraint when their dignity and honours are disrespected. When someone, who may be a fellow rickshaw puller, a driver of a vehicle or even a passenger, uses abusive, disrespectful words or phrases to him or his family, a rickshaw puller automatically counters with reactions and responses.¹⁰⁰ They cannot tolerate such dishonour. Hence, they use bad words, leading to heated debates

⁹⁸ Individual Interview, no 7, interviewed on August 16, 2022.

⁹⁹ FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*; Individual Interviews, no 2, 5, 8, 11 and 21, *Op. cit.*

and engaging in physical violence, especially with fellow rickshaw pullers where they have less disparity in their power dynamics. Both drivers try to win their arguments; therefore, they use verbally abusive words and resort to physical violence. Neither of the parties has the patience to tolerate each other. When they engage in fights on the street, someone else, like other rickshaw drivers, passengers, ordinary public, traffic personnel, hawkers, pedestrians etc., comes forward to separate them physically.¹⁰¹

Preferential Avoidance

Under different conditions, an application of avoidance strategies is beneficial for rickshaw pullers, especially when they intend to escape from conflict situations. They utilise an avoidance approach when the other disputant party is more powerful than them. For instance, avoidance techniques they mostly used when they get involved in complex situations with the traffic police, heavy vehicles, and passengers who come from the elite class. They self-cautiously avoid conflicts with traffic police because they are aware of their power and connections which are not adequate to conflicts with police.¹⁰² When encountering misbehaviour for disregarding traffic signals or for other reasons, they attempt to escape any verbal engagements with the traffic police as such engagement could be costlier than escaping from the problem.

Rickshaw pullers also avoid confrontation with garage owners due to their dependence on them to rent rickshaws.¹⁰³ Unless they avoid conflicts with garage owners, it would impact their earnings and put families under economic strains as renting a rickshaw is difficult for a seasonal driver, who could not hire a rickshaw without a proper guarantee.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, they have less power compared to owners which could affect outcomes of such a conflict. Therefore, non-permanent rickshaw pullers prefer avoidance to compete with any such actors.

Accommodating with Others' Demands

Rickshaw pullers apply the accommodation approach when they have to yield or satisfy the interests and goals of others. For example, they have to obey the basic rules and regulations of the streets and sometimes tolerate abuse or comply with the demands and exploitation of others. The majority of the respondents highlighted that they often use accommodation techniques due to their weaknesses to protest or defend themselves. For both purposes, they accommodate others' demands. For instance, they

¹⁰¹ FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

¹⁰² FGD-3, *Op. cit.*

¹⁰³ FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ N. Jahan, *Op. cit.*

give inducements to corrupt traffic personnel when they violate traffic rules. Under the circumstances, they just accommodate other's unsaid demands and give quick carrots to avoid any type of harassment.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, they comply with certain rules and legal restrictions of certain areas where there are restrictions for rickshaws to enter, particularly when they enter those areas. Either they obey those regulations or have to move away from those areas quickly to avoid fines or arrests from the streets. However, in the worst-case situation, as one respondent mentioned, accommodation mode is also considered to accept harassment or abuse from the passengers.¹⁰⁶ They often tolerate such types of abusive violence, especially when rickshaw pullers urgently need money or do not have any interests to fight back with those passengers due to power disparity. Under various circumstances, once they apply the accommodation technique, it indicates their vulnerability in urban cities where they are for earning money.

Collaborating for Common Benefits

Parties collaborate when they find a mutually beneficial position that satisfies their interests and goals. Rickshaw pullers in their daily lives collaborate with fellow drivers, garage owners, and legal bodies on the street and in other locations. For example, when two rickshaw pullers argue over a parking spot or get passengers in a congested area, they may employ the collaborative approach to understand each other's viewpoints, explore alternate choices, and agree on a fair and polite arrangement.¹⁰⁷ Thus, they avoid aggravating a situation that could lead to arguments and quarrels. When a disagreement evolves, it leads to either a win-lose or lose-lose outcome for the parties. Engaging in disagreements or fights could lead to trauma and injury that are not expected for any parties on the street. Therefore, depending on the nature and context of conflicts, they apply a collaborative approach that jointly benefits them. For example, sometimes they promptly hand over a tiny amount to a traffic Ansar person to enter a street where rickshaws are unauthorised to ply, which benefits both parties.¹⁰⁸ One gets unlawful financial benefits, while the other avoids a long route to reach the destination.

Compromising for a Win-Win Outcome

Like other actors, rickshaw pullers compromise to balance their interests and needs with others. They need to find a middle ground between competing and

¹⁰⁵ FGD-2, *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ Individual Interview, no 20, interviewed on October 5, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ FGD-1, arranged in Shahid Nagar area of Lalbagh on 11 November, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ FGD-4, *Op. cit.*

accommodating where both parties partially, if not fully, satisfy their needs and interests. For example, rickshaw pullers primarily opt for a compromise mode in situations where they have to bargain and negotiate for fares.¹⁰⁹ When a passenger offers a cheap fare for commuting, they bargain to increase the rate. If they succeed, it brings benefits for them. When they cannot succeed in bargaining, they agree with a low fare so that earning continues. Instead of sitting idle, rickshaw pullers focus on having some earnings; they decline the trip, when it is too cheap for them.

Once a rickshaw is stolen by a thief, there are instances when rickshaw pullers get cooperation from the garage owner, who owns the rickshaws. Both parties compromise to avoid paying them an enormous amount of compensation.¹¹⁰ When rickshaw pullers express willingness to pay compensation that convinces some garage owners. Both parties show a willingness to give up some portions of their interests that help to avoid an unwanted conflict situation.

In terms of uncomfortable relations with garage owners or house owners, seasonal rickshaw pullers who do not have any permanent residence but live in informal and cheap accommodation facilities compromise more compared to those who have permanent living arrangements in Dhaka.¹¹¹ They compromise their living standard to stay close to the garage and secure renting a rickshaw from the garage owner every day. Moreover, they compromise with any other actors on the streets, like traffic personnel or other vehicle drivers/owners, since seasonal rickshaw pullers are less aware of the rules and regulations of the streets than permanent rickshaw pullers of the city.

Discussion

Relevance of the T-KCMM in Addressing Rickshaw Pullers' Conflicts

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Model (T-KCMM) has been used in different contexts for analysing conflicts and responses that parties apply to deal with their conflicts. Although the T-KCMM was developed to study workers and their routine conflicts during the 1970s, it has helped to analyse numerous conflicts involving labourers and individuals and understand their strategies and approaches in responding to conflicts. Therefore, it is relevant to analyse conflicts of marginalised

¹⁰⁹ FGD-5, *Op. cit.*; Individual Interview, no 3, 12 and 20, interviewed respectively on August 16, September 16 and October 5, 2022.

¹¹⁰ FGD-1, *Op. cit.*; Ibid.

¹¹¹ Individual Interview, no 5,9,10,12, 15,20 and 24, respectively interviewed on August 16, September 05, 16 and 24, and October 5 and 11, 2022.

rickshaw pullers and the strategies they apply for handling such conflicts in urban cities like Dhaka.

While considering the nature of conflicts that rickshaw pullers experience in Dhaka city, it looks like their conflicts are mostly related to the financial and dignity issues that they face on the streets and garage areas. They usually face misconduct from passengers, including physical assault, belittling, scolding, paying unjustly, or quarrels over the fare. The financial issues are their main interests to protect, for which they not only engage in arguments and tussles but also resort to some forms of physical assaults and violence. Nevertheless, most of their conflicts are non-violent, except for a few, which largely depend on the power, influence, and evolving relationship of the actors who get into a conflict process with rickshaw pullers. They engage in violent conflicts with passengers and fellow rickshaw pullers over financial and respect issues. They want to protect their financial gains, for which they migrate to Dhaka and work hard to uphold dignity.

Based on the theoretical framework of conflict and the T-KCMM, our findings suggest that not all conflict rickshaw pullers compete; they only apply a competitive approach on those issues where their financial interests and respect issues are at stake. As mentioned before, they join in fighting with fellow rickshaw pullers and occasionally with passengers. Nevertheless, they do not apply this approach when they find serious power disparity with the other party/actors. For instance, the traffic police and Ansar, and garage owners are considered more powerful to them. Therefore, despite facing various problems and harassment, they avoid engaging in aggressive behaviour with them due to significant power differences with these actors. Avoidance of conflict is profitable for them. Avoiding arguments and conflicts with garage/rickshaw owners and police helps them to overcome unwanted stress and harm and achieve their objectives of earning money through rickshaw pulling.

On the other hand, they sometimes just accommodate the abusive behaviour of some actors for their benefit. They have to accommodate others' unlawful demands due to their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. For example, they often bribe when they violate traffic rules. This means there is a connection between vulnerability and corruption. Although this mode may help them to maintain temporary harmony, it results in a loss of self-esteem and costs money and their mental peace. On other occasions, they have to accommodate for their benefit. When they do not have a legal contract with the owners of the accommodation, it endangers their eviction from their informal living space. Therefore, accommodate the demands of the garage owners. On the other hand, they prefer collaboration to accommodation as the former serves the common interests of both parties. As a non-assertive and cooperative approach that results in a win-win

outcome. They collaborate with other rickshaw pullers in a parking space and cooperate with corrupt traffic Ansar persons for both parties' benefits, meaning common financial benefits encourage these parties to collaborate on the streets.

One of the cruxes of the T-KCMM is that parties' compromise for a win-win situation comes out of the conflict situation. Although rickshaw pullers compromise with passengers for fares, they reach a consensus point on the fare through intense bargaining, meaning bargaining and negotiations are integral parts of the rickshaw pullers and passengers' compromise pact. They may not have a written agreement but agree on a social contract for riding to a certain distance with an agreed fair. Nevertheless, they maintain another social contract with other rickshaw pullers to avoid competition for passengers in specific places at certain times. They maintain such a deal to benefit all so that they can earn money quickly without being confrontational with the passengers and fellow rickshaw pullers.

Other than their pursuit of compromised mechanisms, sometimes third parties facilitate a process to end their violent conflicts with others. For example, when they engage in fights on the street with a fellow rickshaw puller, someone else, such as other rickshaw drivers, passengers, ordinary public, traffic personnel, hawkers, pedestrians etc., comes forward to separate them physically. The involvement of third parties who come forward to separate the conflicting rickshaw pullers reduces the extent of assertiveness that could contribute to the T-KCMM. Once they separate them, they go away or focus on their own business. Given a rapidly evolving conflict situation, such actors, who help in settling the disputes in their own ways, are truly powerful stakeholders and peacemakers in addressing rickshaw pullers' conflicts on the street. Therefore, one cannot deny the contribution of the T-KCMM in exploring and analysing the approaches and strategies rickshaw pullers apply in managing their everyday conflict in the streets of Dhaka.

Conclusion

Rickshaw pullers, who mostly migrate temporarily from rural areas or live permanently in Dhaka, constitute a community that makes people's busy lives easy. Although they maintain a humble subsistence through their hard labour, they face various unwelcoming events and diverse conflicts with different actors and apply pragmatic strategies and approaches to deal with those conflicts. This paper finds that rickshaw pullers broadly experience conflicts in four aspects: financial issues, shared space, entry restriction and legal space, and personal space and dignity issues. They engage in conflicting relations with different actors, including passengers, fellow rickshaw pullers, garage owners, other vehicle drivers, traffic personnel, etc., mostly over financial and individual respect issues. Despite experiencing abuse and

harassment by rowdy passengers, garage owners, and traffic authorities, most of their conflicts are non-violent, which leads to verbal exchanges in quarrels, except for some occasional violent engagement with fellow rickshaw pullers and on rare events with passengers. Nevertheless, their engagement in violent conflict is mostly determined by their power dynamics with the other actors.

While analysing their response mechanisms to those conflicts in line with the T-KCMM, we argue that they undertake pragmatic approaches that protect their interests. They apply a prioritised competitive approach mostly to deal with financial issues and consider the power dynamics of the parties to determine the extent of engagement with others. Depending on their power parity they show less self-restraint and become assertive in responding to conflicts that originate from disrespect and dishonour with fellow rickshaw pullers. Nevertheless, they preferentially avoid conflicts when the disputant party is more powerful and avoidance is less costly than engaging in quarrels and disputes with passengers and garage owners. Due to their structural weaknesses and ignorance, rickshaw pullers accommodate others' demands and collaborate for common benefits. They only compromise through generous negotiation and bargaining, culminating in informal social contracts with passengers, garage owners, and traffic personnel to balance the economic interests that help them escape from any unwanted situations in their uninterrupted earning process. Nevertheless, a range of actors, such as rickshaw drivers, passengers, traffic personnel, hawkers and pedestrians, approach as powerful third parties and peacemakers to settle their evolving violent conflicts with fellow rickshaw pullers on the streets.

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