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Problems of migrant construction workers during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown

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Abstract---The migrant workers in the construction industry also suffered during the pandemic period as like other sectors. The study analyses the problems and solutions offered in a 360° angle. The migrants were also locked without job, wages, without enough freedom. They observed such a grave condition with their responses. The study revealed that they were well protected with food, accommodation, money for needs even though they were not regularly paid and no work sites were opened. They are less concerned about them, very few opined about their fear about death, too. But the family, employers, and the society were concerned about their well being. The study hints the future scope to conduct such a study in other segments other than construction industry.

Keywords---migrant workers, COVID-19, problem, inter-state.

Introduction

Migrant workers in Kerala face multiple challenges such as exploitation and much lower wages and work longer hours than local labourers, where will have a migrant population between 45.7 lakh and 47.9 lakh by 2025. Many migrant workers had their employment summarily suspended or terminated as the virus spread, leaving them without a source of income. Some employees were stood down without pay, while others had their hours or rates of pay reduced, or were required to go on leave. Others were not paid for work they had done, in violation of the terms of their contracts.

Migrant workers often found themselves stranded due to lockdowns and border closures. Others were suddenly repatriated, without operational systems and protocols in place. Returnees were then often stigmatized and subject to long periods of compulsory quarantine because they were considered to be carriers of COVID-19 face issues such as non-payment or delayed payments. Construction sector in the state heavily depends on migrant labour and engages the largest proportion of such workers in the state. They do not have any way to express their grievances, it was stated.

Scope of the study

Migrant workers were often directly or indirectly excluded from COVID-19 social protection packages made available to national workers, such as basic healthcare and income security measures against sudden job and wage losses. This left them even more exposed to be pandemic. Unemployed, unable to leave and without any kind of help, many migrant workers incurred additional debt and lost savings, which they used to cover basic living costs for themselves and their families or to try to return home.

Statement of the problem

With the lockdown on 25 March 2020, everyone except those who worked in essential services lost employment. The announcement of lockdown panicked the workers and their families at the native place. During the initial days, access to food was a challenge, particularly for the footloose labourers in the absence of an employer to take care of their food expenses. The Local Self-Governments (LSGs) delegated the provision of food to employers and those who gave houses/rooms on rent to workers. However, given the mobility constraints, large number of workers need to feed them thrice a day, this was something the house owners could not afford to or manage. The community kitchens set up by the LSGs initially did not provide free food to migrant workers.

Relevance of the study

The fundamental rights of the individual are not confined to mere survival, but it is also about the right to the livelihood, dignity, liberty and health of the citizens. Hence, the same should naturally be extended to the underprivileged class, whereas a free soul of a civic society they should have the right to live with dignity and to be treated equally. However, the inherent inequality in India's socio-economic system violates the fundamental rights of the citizens of the Republic of India. The government instruction to the employers of the workers not to deduct their wages as they are not working and welfare funds worth crores to support the building and construction workers registered with their employers.

Review of literature

Babu,B.et.al.(2007) In India, rural impoverishment and livelihood opportunities in cities result in rural-urban migration. However, migrants face myriad of challenges at destination. This paper reports living conditions of internal labour migrants living in 13 Indian cities. migrants are deprived of basic amenities and

are marginalised to access several social entitlements. Since migrants are an inalienable part of the cities, the governments should recognise them as a vulnerable group that needs targeted interventions.

Bhagat B.,and Keshri, K.(2019) As per the reports of WHO, the COVID-19, first reported in December 2019, put the whole world in an unprecedented crisis and lingering uncertainty with innumerable deaths, widespread fiscal gloominess, job loss, quarantine, inevitable lockdown, and travel-ban that was imposed globally as a necessity to tackle the pandemic. Findings highlight the different plight of the migrants, who had the pressing need to head back home to safety despite the acute financial crisis and the travel problems. The poor quality of the relief camps with meagre rations and lack of facilities especially put the women and children in distress and generated a lot of psychosocial issues. The present study urges the mental health-care professionals to groom themselves for facing the challenges of a surge in mental illnesses by taking necessary measures. It also emphasises the need to establish a strong ethical alliance between the local population, health systems, local government mechanisms, and human rights associations in order to take a relook at the national migration policies

Bhagat B, Reshmi S, Sahoo H et al. (2020) To mitigate the effect of the lockdown on the vulnerable groups, Government of India on 26 March 2020, announced a Rs. 1.70-lakh-crore package under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana. Central Government also gave an order to the state governments to use Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund of Rs.52000 crores to provide relief to Construction Workers through direct benefit transfer (DBT). Government of India gave a strict order to seal all interstate and district borders and asked states to issue necessary orders to District authorities to ensure adequate arrangements of temporary shelters (especially near highways) with adequate amenities and basic requirements, provision of food, clothing and health measure for the poor and needy people including migrants labourer, stranded due to lockdown measures in their respective areas.

Dandekar,A.(2020) The imposition of the lockdown as a mea sure to contain the exponential progression of the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant labourers the most. Even, witness to harrowing, nerve-wrenching and bone chilling images of the exodus of these marginal and “invisible” drivers of the informal economy of urban India. Indian highways emptied of most vehicles were lined with bedraggled, poor pedestrians, many carrying all their worldly belongings in bundles on top of their heads walking to their home villages, hundreds or thousands of miles away across states.

Zabeer S, Inbaraj LR, George CE, Norman G.(2019) Migrant construction workers had poor physical, social, and psychological QoL, whereas QoL in environmental domain is better compared with studies done across the country and it was significantly associated with higher income, education, better accommodation, and type of work. they recommend strategies to improve their physical, social and psychological well-being of this vulnerable population through strict legislations.

Research Gap

There are many studies conducted about migrant workers during the Covid-19 and Lock down period. But there was no specific study about the migrant construction labours and their problems within the location of Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala.

Objectives

- i) To analyse the origin state of the respondents.
- ii) To ascertain the various of problems of the migrant construction workers during the Covid-19 and lockdown period.
- iii) To know the impact of solutions, remedies offered to the migrant construction workers during the Covid-19 and lockdown period.

Research Methodology

This paper aims to study the problems of the migrant construction workers during the Covid-19 and lockdown period in the Thiruvananthapuram District. The area of study includes all the commercial sectors where the outside labours who all are available in the District.

Research Design

The research design of the study was made in connection with the collection and analysis of data. The study is of both descriptive and exploratory in nature. Both the primary and the secondary sources were collected and used for data processing. The opinion of the respondents was collected using a standard questionnaire. Various published sources including periodicals, news papers, online portals and e books and others were used for secondary data collection. The survey sample was selected by the method of convenient sampling. The respondents are working within the geographical limits of Thiruvananthapuram District. The sample size consists of 54.

Frame work of analysis

The analysis were completed with the following statistical techniques and tools:

- i) per cent
- ii) ANOVA test
- iii) Garrett Ranking Method

Analysis & Interpretation

Table No.1
Socio- Demographic Profile

Sl.No	Particulars	Number	Per cent
1	Odisha	03	20
2	West Bengal	38	40

3	Bihar	3	.05
5	Assam	9	10
Total		53	100

Source: Primary Data

According to Table No.1, out of 53 respondents, most of the respondents 38 are (40 per cent) from West Bengal. Other respondents 24 are (20 per cent) from Odisha, 6 are (0.5 per cent) from Bihar, 17 are (15 per cent) from Assam.

Table No.2
Problems of the Migrant Workers during covid-19 and lockdown period

Sl.No	Problems of the migrant workers.	Strongly Agree	Agree	UNDECIDED	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1	No wages	20	45	10	15	10	100
2	No work	53	17	0	10	20	100
3	No Food	5	10	5	10	70	100
4	No medical facility	30	10	40	5	10	100
5	No proper accommodation	20	15	15	35	15	100
6	Agony / fear of death	30	20	5	25	20	100
7	No financial support	20	30	10	20	20	100
8	More restrictions and penalty	25	10	15	20	30	100

Source: Primary Data

According to Table No.2, different Problems of the Migrant Workers, Most of them (45%) agreed that there was no wages. Most of the respondents (53%) are strongly agreed that there was no food. Majority of the respondents (40%) are undecided about there was no medical facility. Most of the respondents (35%) are disagreed that they have no proper accommodation. Most of the respondents (30%) are strongly agreed that they had agony/fear of death. Most of the respondents (30%) are agreed that they had no financial support.

Ho: There was no association between attitude of the migrant labours and related parties during Covid-19 and Lockdown period problems

Table No.3 ANOVA Test Problems of the Migrant Labours during Covid-19 and Lock Down period

Sl.No	Particulars	P.Value	Significance/Insignificance
1	Self approach to Covid-19	.03	Significant

2	Employer /Society attitude	.054	Insignificant
3	Government /society support	.07	Insignificant
5	Family's concern	.0101**	Insignificant
6	Co worker's attitude	.0501	Insignificant

*Level of Significance @5%

**Level of Significance @1%

*Source: Primary Data

The factors between attitude of the migrant labours and related parties during Covid-19 and Lockdown period problems Self approach to Covid-19 was significant. The Employer /Society attitude, Government /society support, Family's concern, Co worker's attitude, are insignificant.

Table No.4
Essential support available during Covid-1 & Lock Down

Sl.No	Statement	Total Score	Mean Score	Rank
1	Food	238.0	4.5	1
2	Financial Support	185.5	3.5	3
3	Medical support	169.6	3.2	4
4	Accommodation	212.0	4.00	2

*Source: Primary Data

According to Table No.4, Garette Ranking, Food ranked as Rank 1, Accommodation ranked as 2, Financial Support ranked as 3 and Medical support ranked as 4, based on the opinion of the migrant construction workers, the essential support received during the covid -19 and lock down period

Findings

- Most of the respondents(30 per cent) are from West Bengal
- The factors different Problems of the Migrant Workers, Most of them (45%) agreed that there was no wages. Most of the respondents (53%) are strongly agreed that there was no food. Majority of the respondents (40%) are undecided about there was no medical facility. Most of the respondents (35%) are disagreed that they have no proper accommodation. Most of the respondents (30%) are strongly agreed that they had agony/fear of death. Most of the respondents (30%) are agreed that they had no financial support
- The factors between attitude of the migrant labours and related parties during Covid-19 and Lockdown period problems Self approach to Covid-19

was significant. The Employer /Society attitude, Government /society support, Family's concern, Co worker's attitude, are insignificant.

- Food ranked as Rank 1, Accommodation ranked as 2, Financial Support ranked as 3 and Medical support ranked as 4, based on the opinion of the migrant construction workers, the essential support received during the Covid -19 and lock down period

Limitation

- The study covers only the respondents stayed/came back from native after Covid-19 and lockdown.
- The migrants workers were hesitant to vote their outlook liberally.

Future scope of the study

The future scope of the study includes the further investigation on sector wise employees problems and availed solutions during the covid-19 and lockdown period. Similarly, the state based migrants problems and solutions can be studied.

Conclusion

The migrant construction labours are one of the key factors in the Kerala economy. But they are paid very less and in the covid -19 and lock down period they suffered but the general public and government supported them, very well. They got good abundant food, accommodation, social empathetic approach and dignity during this era. The term 'guest worker' improved their self perceptions as image.

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