



## COVID-19: A STUDY OF CHALLENGES FACED BY DAILY WAGE WORKERS AND MIGRANTS IN INDIA.

**Aparna H**

2nd Year under Graduate, Department of Economics, Stella Maris College, Cathedral road, Chennai-600086.

### ABSTRACT

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the daily wage workers and migrants has been largely unsettling and it has pushed our economy to recession. Wages have an important role in maintaining the livelihood and the well-being of the work force. According to Jules Backman, a fluctuation in wage rates stands as a great concern to everyone in the economy. To a worker, wage is an important source of livelihood, to a businessman wage symbolizes cost and in the eyes of the government, wage is represented as potential taxes. Therefore, any alterations in the worker's livelihood can cause an adverse impression on the economy. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has drained the livelihoods of millions of daily wage workers and migrants and their socio-economic conditions have also been shaken. This study will elucidate the disputes confronted by the daily wage workers and migrants. Two surveys have been conducted for this study. Study 1: A survey was taken among 130 daily wage workers to understand the Problems encountered by them. Study 2: To highlight the difficulties faced by the migrants, a survey was taken among 100 migrants. The research work is based on primary source of data collected by interviewing the daily wage and migrant workers of Coimbatore and Tirupur districts of Tamil Nadu.

**KEYWORDS :** COVID-19, Livelihood, Daily Wage, Migrants, Workers

### INTRODUCTION:

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, the Indian government ordered a complete national lockdown. The lockdown was announced without any notice. India was fast to close all its national, state borders and prescribed a succession of quarantine measures which was to be followed rigorously everywhere in India. Dime a dozen of workers, particularly migrants and daily wage workers were straightaway turned out to be unemployed as the lockdown was declared by the government. Not all workers had sufficient savings for food and other essential things. It only lasted for a very short period of time. Millions of daily wage and migrant workers got trapped in the fetters of poverty. A large consultancy conducted 18,000 household surveys in 10 states where on an average, 60% of the households lost job in the month of April and 20% of the people ran out of all their incomes and provisions. Only 6% of the people received some form of private funding from relations and NGO'S. The lives of migrant workers got miserable every day. They did not have ration cards and proper income to access food aid and other essentials for survival. All of these triggered the migrant workers to go back to their villages on foot, travelling hundreds of kilometers which also caused death and other health issues.

### OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY:

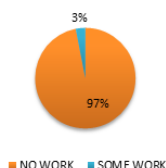
The welfare of migrant laborers and daily wage laborers was given least importance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to sudden implementation of lockdown, more than 400 million laborers were stranded and left to suffer. The main objective of the study is to understand the problems encountered by these laborers during the lockdown enforced by the government.

### STUDY 1: SURVEY OF DAILY WAGE WORKERS

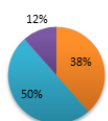
This study focuses on the daily wage workers. A survey was conducted among 130 wage workers in Coimbatore and Tiruppur districts of Tamil Nadu. These daily wage workers have been categorized on the basis of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled works.

**FIGURE 1:**

**LOCKDOWN 1&2**



**LOCKDOWN 3**

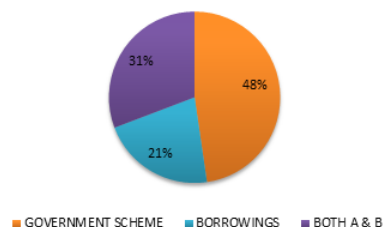


■ FULL WORK ■ SOME WORK ■ NO WORK

- In figure 1, two separate pie charts have been shown which represents three phases of lockdown. Lockdown one and two imprinted an abysmal impact on the livelihoods of daily wage workers. When the national wide lockdown was announced on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 97% of the daily wage workers lost their jobs. When India was put under lockdown, people were asked to stay indoors which was not a choice for a daily wage worker because their livelihood depends on the everyday wage. Covid-19 lockdown lead to massive socio-economic crises which were particularly seen in the local levels where hunger and poverty was rampant. Therefore, the unorganized working sector of the society saw the worst hit with no savings and entirely reliant on their everyday life.
- Figure 2 represents the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of lockdown where government relaxed few restrictions and employees were allowed to get back on track. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of lockdown, only 38% of daily wage workers got their full job. These people were mostly skilled and semi-skilled workers like electricians, plumbers, drivers etc.
- About 50% of daily wage workers got some job. Their wages per day was reduced due to the struggles faced by the economy as a whole. Among the 130 wage workers, 12% of the workers did not get any work which made their lives miserable every day.
- Many businesses and companies were thoughtful and generous. The daily wage workers were given free food and half of their pay even during the lockdown.

**FIGURE 2:**

**SOURCE OF INCOME**

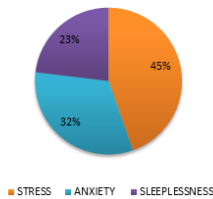


- The main source of income for the daily wage workers were primarily dependent on government schemes, private borrowings like family and friends. Few workers had to approach both to manage their families. 48% of the daily wage workers used government assistance for their livelihood. In Tiruppur, many of the daily wage workers were sent to work in different farms every day. These people worked under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which provided 100 days of work to daily wage workers in rural areas. The Indian government also provided 1000 rupees through PDS (public distribution system).
- 21% of the daily wage workers borrowed money from neighbors, relatives and friends. Many neighborhoods provided them with small jobs at home such as cleaning, washing, gardening etc. Many

women daily wage earners were compelled to borrow from Women Self Help Group and various micro finances to make their ends meet and to pay their loan dues. 31% of the workers approached both the government and private borrowings to maintain their lives.

**FIGURE 3:**

**MENTAL WELL BEING**



- Figure 3 reflects the mental health of the daily wage workers who had lost their livelihood during the pandemic. The national wide lockdown to combat the novel coronavirus has posed a serious threat to the mental health of the daily wage workers. This survey revealed that due to financial insecurities, about 45% of the workers underwent stress, 32% of the workforce had anxiety and the remaining 23% had problems relating to sleeplessness.
- A lot of depression, emotional stress, anxiety, and insomnia will have potential repercussion on the productivity levels as we move further into restarting the economy.
- These lockdown months in India have witnessed the highest number of domestic violence against women and children in 10 years. Household stresses have increased domestic violence. As people stay at home, Families spend a lot of time together including in cramped conditions. On the other hand, the ability to earn a living has decreased the access to basic needs causing additional stress.

**Study 2:a Survey To Understand The Difficulties Faced By Migrants**

This study focuses on migrants from different parts of India. A survey was conducted among 100 migrants residing in Coimbatore and Tiruppur districts of Tamil Nadu. The Covid-19 lockdown had a devastating impact on migrant workers all over India. The sudden implementations of lockdown lead to severe distress among the migrant workers. The survey covered few important areas- 1) Income security, 2) Food security, 3) Transportation facilities and 4) Access to government support

**Figure 1: Income Security**

A)

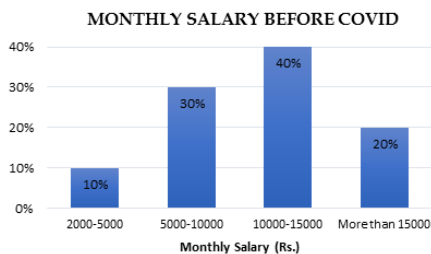
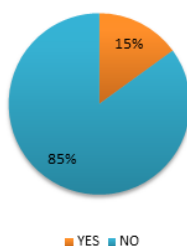


Figure 1 represents the range of monthly salary of migrant workers before the pandemic. 30% of the migrant workers reported a monthly income of between INR 5000-10000, about 40% earning a monthly salary between INR 10000-15000, followed by 20% who earned INR more than 15000 per month prior to the lockdown.

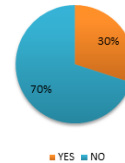
**B) Did You Continue To Receive A Wage During Lockdown?**



- Due to continuous lockdown posed by the Indian government, 85% of the respondents no longer received wages. 15% of the respondents continued to get paid during the lockdown.

**Figure 2: Food Security**

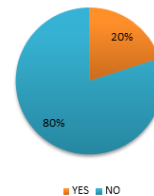
**DID YOUR CONTRACTOR OR EMPLOYER PROVIDE YOU WITH FOOD DURING THE LOCKDOWN?**



- In the response to the question, only 30% of the workers were provided with food. The remaining 70% of the workers were not provided with food.
- 30% of the respondents were also provided free accommodations and food.
- None of the migrant workers had access to ration cards which provoked many of the migrant workers to go back to their hometowns. These migrant workers were completely dependent on their employers and contractors for food supplies.

**Figure 3: Transportation Facilities**

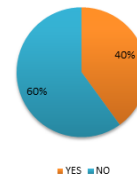
**DID YOUR EMPLOYER OR CONTACTOR HELP YOU WITH TRANSPORTATION TO GO BACK TO YOUR HOMETOWN?**



- In response to the question, only 20% of the migrant workers were provided transportation facilities by their employer or contractor. The remaining 80% of the workers struggled to go back to their hometowns. Many of the migrants travelled by walking day and night without any food. This led to severe health problems like stress, sleeplessness, depression etc.

**Figure 4: Access To Government Support**

**DID YOU SEEK HELP FROM THE GOVERNMENT?**



- In response to the question, 40% of the workers got help from the government. The remaining 60% of the workers either got assistance from their employer or contractor or they travelled back to their hometown.
- The Tamil Nadu government provided accommodations, food supplies and arranged for transportation to assist the migrant workers.

**MALPRACTICES DURING LOCKDOWN:**

- In a first-hand experience, PDS shops in villages of Tirupur district indulged in hoarding food grains and selling them at a higher price to migrant workers residing around the village. The grains that were supposed to be supplied free were sold to these people for money. Due to such practices, the migrant laborers struggled to make ends meet.
- During lockdown, Tamil Nadu government arranged buses and trains for migrant workers to get back to their hometowns. In such movements, they set a target to transport a fixed number of people every day. Under these circumstances, many migrant laborers

were forced to go back to their hometowns even though the employer or contractor was willing to give them job and pay for their livelihood.

#### GOVERNMENT'S ROLE:

- As per the study conducted by MIDS and state department of economics and statistics, 53% of Tamil Nadu households lost their jobs.
- 80% of the poor households were benefited through government schemes. Among the schemes, food transfer to ration cardholders-Free rice, oil, pulses, sugar other grains were considered very beneficial.
- Apart from food supplies, financial assistance of INR 1000 was also given. Non ration cardholders got benefitted through Amma Canteens.
- The state's public system was used by 99% of rural population and 97% by urban population during the first phase of lockdown (March-May)
- Migrants who are not beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act (2013), NFSA, or possess State cards, the government has guaranteed free supply of 5kg of food grain per person and 1kg channa per family per month for two months.
- The government also gave assurance about One Nation One Ration Card Scheme which will allow the migrant workers to access food in other states other than their permanent residence.

#### CONCLUSION:

Our country is a labor-oriented and labor-intensive society. It is the prime duty of the government to protect the living conditions and economy of the basic laborers. Our government should have made proper arrangement for shifting migrant laborers even before the lockdown was implemented. The security and well-being of laborers is of utmost importance in the growth of our economy. The employers on their behalf should offer job security to migrant laborers and keep them economically comfortable.

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