
Reasons for Migration and Socio-Economic Status of Migrant Construction Workers in North India

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Abstract: *In a population of 20,000 migrant construction workers in selected strata in Gurgaon and New Delhi, 2670 samples were examined. The socio-economic status of migrant construction workers and various reasons for migration were investigated. An extensive number of village youngsters, including minors, were employed as migratory construction labourers, according to the exploratory research and case study. The leading causes of young migration to cities are poverty, a lack of employment opportunities, and the children's requirements in terms of health and education. Their exposure to government social programmes is insufficient, and their saving habits were found to be highly unbalanced.*

Key Words: *Migrant Construction Workers, Reasons for Migration, Socio-Economic Status, Saving Habits.*

Introduction

The infrastructure development of any nation is part of its economic growth. It includes the construction of roads and bridges and related construction works. In India, the construction sector is the largest employer of unorganized labour next to the agricultural sector (Laskar and Murty, 2004). There was a steady growth of construction works until 2000 and after that fast development in the construction field. The contribution of the construction sector in India to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) at factor cost in 2006–07 was Rupees 1,965,550 million, registering an increase of 10.7% from the previous year, and the share of construction in GDP has increased from 6.1% in 2002–03 to 6.9% in 2006–07. Around 16 per cent of India's working population depends on building construction for its livelihood. Today, the Indian construction industry employs about 31 million people and creates assets worth over Rupees 200,000 million annually (Barnabas et al., 2009).

The current study was conducted in 2021 in Gurgaon, Haryana and Delhi among construction workers. Most of the workers migrated into construction jobs in dire need of livelihood. The current study highlights the socio-demographic profile of the workers, their socio-economic status and reasons for migration. Irrespective of ample welfare schemes for the workers, access to such schemes were limited for the working class.

Most construction workers migrated from adjoining states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, all within approximately 250-300 km of Delhi. Sixty percent originated from the states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and around six percent migrated from distant tribal areas of Chhattisgarh. The construction workers tend to be seasonal migrants, travelling only when work is available in Delhi; during harvesting, they return to their villages. A significant proportion has stayed in Delhi for less than one year, and the others have moved from one work site to another within Delhi. When contractors recruit several people from the same village to work on a construction site, it creates a sense of community and security at the workplace.

Despite their involvement in the construction sector, where there is the excessive flouting of labour laws and rhetoric with respect to wages, working conditions, and hours, not a single migrant worker in this study was part of a union. Although migrant construction workers are scattered all over the city, an organizational initiative for union participation is lacking, partly because the work crews consist of migrants from different regions and communities. The seasonal nature of their jobs, fear of job loss, and contractors' victimization further complicate the situation and discourage labour organizing.

According to Munni, a 42-year-old migrant male from Uttar Pradesh, 'the contractors take advantage of us and try to exploit us. We, construction workers, assemble on the "nakas" i.e., street corners, in search of work from the contractors. 'We are ill-treated because we do not have any identity and nobody listens to us. We often do not get work for more than 15 days a month. We also cannot bargain about our wages as other labourers are willing to work for lower wages'.

Living conditions among Delhi's Migrant construction worker's low levels of earning act as a hindrance to migrants seeking improved living standards. Visiting the construction sites and workers' makeshift houses, the researchers

gathered a general perception of migrants' living conditions. Construction workers live in some of the most deplorable conditions to be found in Delhi. They have no facilities to provide safe drinking water, and the sanitary conditions, in general, are despicable. Despite the Contract Labour Act stipulating that a contractor or employer must provide suitable accommodations to the labourers, dehumanizing living conditions remain typical among the construction migrants.

A study conducted by Nithin et al., (2010) in Karnataka shows that 92.5 % out of 14 lakh workers have been deprived of the benefits of the welfare scheme promoted by the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board, Karnataka. Among the 189 respondents to the survey, only 24% have been aware of the welfare scheme. The major hurdles in extending the Scheme in the form of Legislation non-compliances have been recommended (Nithin et al., 2010).

The construction industry has been broadly classified into-Building works (involving projects like houses, offices, schools, factories, shops, hospitals, power plants, stations etc.), and Civil engineering works, (involving projects like roads, tunnels, bridges, dams, canals, docks etc) (Nithin et al, 2010). It requires personnel of different cadres, from unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labourers to technical and management personnel, including contractors. The contractors are responsible for the day-to-day oversight at the construction site providing all of the material, labour, services and equipment (engineering vehicles and tools) necessary for the project. The contractors are classified (NFT Construction, 2010) into:

1. Building contractors build residential, industrial, commercial and other buildings.
2. Heavy/civil contractors build sewers, roads, dams, bridges, tunnels, etc.
3. Special trade contractors are engaged in specialized work like carpentry, painting, plumbing, electrical work, etc.

Construction workers work predominantly on construction sites and are typically engaged in the regular aspects of the industry other than design and financing. They are comprised of both local and migrant workforce. The worker's segment includes the daily wage labour and members of specialist trade such as electricians, carpenters and plumbers (Jennifer et al, 2010]. Due to low wages, the poor socio-economic condition was very common

among the construction workers, leading to severe stress and anxiety and making them addicted (Tiwari et al., 2011, Biswas et al., 2012).

The above studies depict the poor socio-economic status of construction workers. The current study conducted recently also explored the exploiting situation in the construction labour market as regards employment of migrant workers concerned.

Methodology

The study has used a mixed methodology with a descriptive research design to collect quantitative data and a case study method for pooling qualitative information. The objective analysis of both is given and discussed following suggestions for future studies and areas of intervention to improve the current status of migrant construction labourers.

Data Analysis

The sample consists of 2670 respondents from Delhi and Haryana. There are 2081 (76.94%) from Gurgaon, 334 (12.51%) from north Delhi and 255 (9.55%) from South Delhi. The women's representation in the migration group is only 6.59%.

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
(10-24) yrs	868	32.51%
(19-24) yrs	2	0.07%
(25-34) yrs	1064	39.85%
(35-44) yrs	420	15.73%
(35-44) yrs	72	2.70%
(45-54) yrs	182	6.82%
(45-54) yrs	9	0.34%
(55-64) yrs	43	1.61%
(55-64) yrs	2	0.07%
65 and above yrs	8	0.30%
Grand Total	2670	

Source: Derived from the data collected.

The majority (39.85%) of the respondents are from the age group (25-34) years, followed by (32.51%) from the (10-24) years group. Considering these age groups, more than 70% of the workers belong to the age group of 34 and below.

It also highlights the dire need for employment and the hike in migration, particularly to the construction field from different rural districts in India.

Table 2: Distribution of Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	%
Any daily wage labour work	251	9.40%
Any other	42	1.57%
Civil Defence	1	0.04%
Construction work	2264	84.79%
Domestic work	21	0.79%
Labour	1	0.04%
Not applicable	2	0.07%
Rag picking	1	0.04%
Self Employed	84	3.15%
Shuttering Labour	1	0.04%
Tri cycle/e-rickshaw	2	0.07%
Grand Total	2670	100.00%

Source: Derived from the data collected.

The occupation of the majority of the migrants is construction work (84.79%), considering the entire study group. As the study focused on the construction industry, most participants fall under that category.

Table 3: Distribution of Educational Background

Educational Background	Frequency	%
Any other	190	7.12%
Graduate	81	3.03%
Intermediate	203	7.60%
Matriculation (IX-X)	444	16.63%
Middle School (V-VIII)	463	17.34%
Never had any formal education	850	31.84%
Primary level (I-V)	437	16.37%
Vocational Training	2	0.07%
Grand Total	2670	100.00%

Source: Derived from the data collected.

Of the 2670 respondents, 31.84% never had formal education, 16.63% had matriculation, and 17.34 % had passed the middle school. Only 3.03% were graduates. Lack of education is thus one of the facts that push them into migration in search of daily jobs. Most of the construction industry labourers do not require formal training except those skilled craftsmen.

Table 4: Reasons for Migrating

Reason for Migrating	Frequency	%
Family	1	0.04%
For Job	292	10.94%
For Surviving	1	0.04%
friends	223	8.35%
low salary	1	0.04%
No job in the native area	2147	80.41%
own decision	1	0.04%
poverty	1	0.04%
To earn money	2	0.07%
Wanted a change of place	1	0.04%
Grand Total	2670	100.00%

Source: Derived from the data collected.

The main reason for migration is the non-availability of a job in the native place (80.41%). When 10.94% migrated in search of any job, 8.35% got into the position on account of the influence of their friends. All other reasons, as found in the table above, were negligible.

Table 5: Bank A/C details

Bank A/C	Frequency	%
No	549	20.56%
Yes	2121	79.44%
Total	2670	100.00%

Source: Derived from the data collected.

Table 6: Mode of Savings Details

Mode of Savings	Frequency	%
Cash	1651	61.84%
No Savings	165	6.18%
Other	4	0.15%
Bank	850	31.84%
Grand Total	2670	100.00%

Source: Derived from the data collected.

The majority (79.44%) of the migrants have a bank account. However, 61.84% have their savings in cash, and only 31.84% have savings in the bank. Most of them prefer to keep money on hand and do not want to deposit it in the bank due to the difficulty of going to banks.

Table 7: Registration Under Any Government Welfare Scheme

Any other	1128	42.25%
AYUSHMAN BHARAT	1	0.04%
BOCW	7	0.26%
MGNREGA	11	0.41%
Not registered	1523	57.04%
Grand Total	2670	100.00%

Source: Derived from the data collected.

57% of the respondents have not registered under any government social welfare scheme. But 42.25% of the respondents joined other welfare schemes than those mentioned in the list.

Case Studies

Two case studies highlighted the socio-economic situation of migrant construction workers.

Mr. Bablu belongs to Uttar Pradesh, District-Sampal. He is 18 years old. He used to work in small grocery shops in his native place. He migrated to Gurugram because he and his family couldn't survive with his small salary. Bablu's mother is suffering from thyroid, and his father is suffering from MYCOBACTERIUM TUBERCULOSIS. His younger brother is also

working as a hawker, which is not so profitable. His younger sister is studying in a Govt. School. She is 12 years old. Due to his family problems, he has been working since age 10. Bablu is the only person on whom the whole family is dependent.

Mr. Gudda belongs to the Dhamoi district of Madhya Pradesh. He is 40 years old. Family Members include the wife and 3 Daughters. His mother is handicapped. Gudda migrated to Gurugram for labour work because, in his native place, he didn't have his own house; he used to change his location occasionally. Now the situation is such that his daughters are growing up, and on account of regular changes of residence, his daughter's education is in trouble. Currently, he is residing at a construction group's labour camp. He is also worried about the continuity of his job because once the construction work is over, he doesn't have a place to go until he gets another work.

Both the cases indicated the financial struggle of the families. The needs of the families for health and education make the socio-economic constraints all the more challenging. Conversations with construction workers revealed similar cases, and the strenuous socio-economic situation made them inevitable to get into any possible job irrespective of the likely chances of exploitation by intermediaries.

The case studies reflected the need to provide an eco-system of protection and adequate measures for legal welfare measures. Although there are several agencies, the access to their support is not often met due to ignorance and illiteracy of the workforce.

Discussion

The quantitative data showed the dire need of the rural unemployed youth seeking migration to find a suitable livelihood. The majority of them being in the age group below 34 again depicts the complex reality of unemployment among the youth. It is evident from the data about reasons for migration. Lack of adequate livelihood means for the natives are the pushing factors, and availability of job opportunities in the growing construction industry are the pulling factors that attract a large majority of the youth to get into construction works. The industry also requires sufficient labour force to meet its labour requirement.

The saving habit of migrant workers was comparatively irregular. Most of them keep cash on hand. Saving in the bank is limited because they do not get adequate time to visit banks, and lack knowledge about the procedures for easy transactions.

Conclusion

The reasons and socio-economic status of migrant construction workers in Gurgaon and Delhi need in-depth study to explore in detail. The sample size was large, and the results gave a better picture of the situation. The lack of job opportunities in Indian villages is a primary reason for migration. The off-season of agriculture saves them time to earn through migrant work. The study also showed the increasing number of village youth in the construction sector due to increasing unemployment among the village youth. The poor saving habit also gives adequate challenges to intervening with various issues emerging among the migrant construction workers in India.

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