

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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**QUALITY WORK LIFE OF MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN CHENNAI**

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**CHENNAI**

**ABSTRACT**

Chennai, the capital City of Tamil Nadu is the fourth largest Metropolitan City in India. The Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) comprises the city of Chennai. The city has a large migrant population with labourers living in slums and pavements and there are number of studies of the conditions of migrant construction workers. This study focused on taking samples of migrant workers from areas of concentration of migrant construction workers especially in Old Mahabalipuram Road, Kodambakkam, T.Nagar and Mount Road where huge buildings and complexes are being built. The nature of work falls under the category of unorganized sector. The study focuses on migrant workers from Kolkata, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. The migrant workers are mainly farm labourers and have only seasonal employment in their native places and are also jobless for 4 to 5 months in a year. The major objective of the paper is to examine the economic conditions, the employment status and the savings and remittances, income and expenditure pattern of the Inter State migrant construction workers in Chennai. A structured questionnaire was administered to 38 women and 62 men employed in construction work in Chennai. The data from male and female respondents from the same site was not collected. There has been a definite shift for both male and female workers from low income bracket to a higher income bracket after migration and employment in the construction work, there is a positive transition in their skill level after migration but the living conditions of these migrants is not satisfactory. The most important observation is that the migrants are very keen on savings for the purpose of remitting money to their native places and they are willing to sacrifice proper accommodation and expenditure on health for the same. Another important negative observation is that there is exploitation of migrant labour by the middlemen, contractors and subcontractors. The Quality Work life of these migrant workers are not satisfactory and more care should be taken towards health care of the workers.

**KEYWORDS**

Quality Work Life, Migrant workers, unorganized sector.

**INTRODUCTION**

The word unorganized means lack of work records, irregular employment and lack of direct employer- employee relations leading to invisibility and vulnerability. The unorganized workers include laborers in construction, Brick kilns, Street vending, Rice mills, Forests, Agriculture and sanitary workers. A lot of young workers both men and women are migrating from state to state for construction work.

Chennai, the capital City of Tamil Nadu is the fourth largest Metropolitan City in India. The Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA) comprises the city of Chennai. The city has a large migrant population with labourers living in slums and pavements. There are number of studies of the conditions of migrant construction workers living in slums and pavements. This study is focused on the interstate migrant construction workers who according to Trade Union representatives, 'are swelling in numbers during this decade'

This study focused on taking samples of migrant workers from areas of concentration of migrant construction workers especially in Old Mahabalipuram Road, Kodambakkam, T.Nagar and Mount Road. Huge buildings and complexes are being built in these areas and most of the workers are interstate migrant labourers. The study focuses on migrant workers from Kolkata, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

**REASONS FOR MIGRATION**

The migrant workers are mainly farm labourers and have only seasonal employment in their native places and are also jobless for 4 to 5 months in a year. The poor economic conditions along with several other factors have been identified as the reasons for migration.

The **reasons for their vulnerability** are-

- Illiteracy
- Irregular work
- Low economic status
- Lack of assets
- Lack of skills

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Permanent migration relates to movement by individuals and families on a permanent basis whereas temporary migration that occurs at regular or irregular intervals and encompasses seasonal migration as a special case, usually linked to agricultural seasons, but also to other seasonal activities such as construction work and tourism. Circular migration relates to movements for work or other reasons within a 30 day period that involves sleeping for a series of consecutive nights away from home and the movements repeated on a more or less regular basis in consecutive months without changing one's perceived place of usual residence. (Bilsborrow (1998)

Construction workers and domestic laborers are victims of debt bondage and face severe wage exploitation, and experience serious health and safety problems resulting from inhumane work and living conditions. The workers experience wage exploitation and excessively long hours of work (between 16-21 hours a day without rest breaks or days off and often exceeding 100 hours per week without rest); sleep and food deprivation and inadequate living conditions; and verbal, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. (Sevil Sönmez)

Temporary work exists in a variety of forms. The most traditional form is casual labour, which remains common, especially for low-skilled work in sectors such as construction and agriculture. (Dr Eugenia Markova)

In Canada, there is no clear legal definition of temporary work, in particular, of agency employment. Especially problematic in this regard are agency jobs, where individuals may have continuous employment over an extended period with a single agency. Lowe and Schellenberg (2001) argue that even though these individuals may work at different 7 clients' job sites, perhaps experiencing some uncertainty about future assignments, their employment may be no more precarious than that of permanent employees.

In India, various empirical studies have shown that the wages of the women workers in the unorganised sector, particularly in the construction industry, have been significantly below the minimum wage (Anand, 1998; Cherian & Prasad, 1995; Khanna & Mathew, 1979; Sinha & Ranade, 1975).

Migration choices and decisions are not made by individuals alone and are often shaped by the larger environment and more specifically families (Waddington and Wheeler 2003).

**NEED FOR THE STUDY**

There are a number of studies on migrant construction workers, especially showing the discrimination and exploitation of women. This study shows that both male and female construction workers are discriminated compared to the local working population in terms of labour contracts, wages, leave, medical benefits and so on. This study thus focuses on both male and female construction workers, their living and working conditions.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The major objective of the paper is to examine

- The economic conditions of the Inter State migrant construction workers in Chennai.
- The Employment Status
- The savings, income and consumption pattern of these construction workers.
- Determination of Quality Work Life of the migrant construction workers.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY****COLLECTION OF DATA****PRIMARY DATA**

The questionnaire method was used to collect the information from construction workers, both male and female workers. A structured questionnaire was administered to 38 women and 62 men employed in construction work in Chennai. The data from male and female respondents from the same site was not collected. Each of them form an individual unit. Most of the questions had to be translated as language was a barrier. In addition there was personal interaction with the respondents to collect some important information.

**SECONDARY DATA**

- Books
- Past records from same topic
- Websites

**DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS****TABLE 1: AGE**

AGE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
<18	-		-		-
18-35	50	81	38	100	88
>35	12	19	-		12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

Out of the total respondents of 62 male workers, 80% of the workers are in the age group of 18-35 years. They migrate at an early age and most of them are married. Out of the 38 women respondents most of them are married and fall in the age group of 18-35.

**TABLE 2: SKILLS**

	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
SKILLED	2	3	-	-	3
UNSKILLED	60	97	38	100	97
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		

97% of the male construction workers and 100% of the women workers are unskilled and a meager 2% of the male respondents are skilled. The majority of them migrate with absolutely no training or skill abilities.

**TABLE 3: LITERACY LEVEL %**

	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
SCHOOL DROP OUTS	4	6	8	21	12
ILLITERATE	58	84	30	79	88
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

6% of the male respondents have attended school compared to a 21% of the female respondents who are school drop outs. The majority of both the male and female construction are illiterate.

**TABLE 4: FAMILY STATUS**

	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
WITH FAMILY	60	97	30	79	90
WITH PARENTS	2	3	8	21	10
SINGLE					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

97% of the male workers are married and live with their wives and only 2% of them are with their parents. Out of 38 female respondents 79% are married and live with their husbands and 21% live with their parents.

**TABLE 5: EMPLOYMENT DETAILS**

JOB CATEGORY	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
MASON	30	48	-	-	42
OTHERS	18	29	6	16	34
HELPERS	14	23	32	84	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

**TABLE 6**

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
LONG TERM (WITH CONTRACT)	4	6	-	-	4
LONG TERM (WITHOUT CONTRACT)	56	90	-	-	56
CASUAL LABOUR	2	4	38	100	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>



TABLE 7

DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
8Hrs	60	97	38	100	98
9Hrs	2	3	-	-	2
10Hrs	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

Table 5, 6 and 7 clearly brings out the employment category, type of employment and the durations of work for both male and female migrant workers. All the female workers are casual workers and their job category is helpers or fall in others category. All women workers work for 8 hours. 48, 29, 23 % of the male workers fall in the category of mason, others and helpers respectively. The type of employment clearly shows that only 6% of the workers are with a working contract and 90% long term jobs with no contract and the balance 2% are casual workers.

The interactions with the migrant workers revealed that they are provided employment through the middlemen and sometimes additional work force is also brought by the existing migrants from their native places. But the entry into the construction work is only through the middlemen.

Moreover, none of the procedures and formalities prescribed in the Interstate Migrant Labour Act is adopted in their recruitment. Most of the workers are not aware as their only aim is getting some employment and money.

TABLE 8 INCOME PER DAY

Rs.	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
<100	18	29	16	42	34
100-250	14	23	22	58	36
>250	30	48	-	-	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

Majority of the male respondents (48%) earn more than 250 rupees per day, whereas majority of female workers earn less than 100 rupees (42%) and 100-250 (58%). This shows that the male workers are paid more than the female workers. The table shows that all the female workers fall in the category of helpers and some with a more experience earn between 100-250. Among the male migrant workers some of them are helpers, some ordinary masons and the other category is masons with many years of experience. Only such experienced workers are able to earn above 250 rupees. These migrant male and female workers prefer to work here as these workers get an average of 40-50 rupees only in their villages and most of them are farm labourers. Moreover their jobs are only seasonal and are jobless for 3 to 4 months a year.

The interactions with the migrant male and female workers revealed that the wages are generally paid on weekly basis, in some cases the workers prefer to collect it at the time of remittance to their families and some of them prefer to collect their wages from their employers when they leave to their native villages. They also said that sometimes advance is given, which is setoff when the wages are paid. The interaction with the respondents revealed that their wages are less compared to that of the local workers.

TABLE 9: MONTHLY EXPENDITURE

FOODEXPENDITURE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
UPTO 1000	4	7	2	5	6
1000-2500	28	45	22	58	50
>2500	30	48	14	37	44
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

A majority of 48% of the male workers spend above 2500 on food and a majority of 58% of the women spend between 1000-2500 on food. A small percentage of 7% and 5% of the male and female migrant workers respectively spend upto 1000 on food.

TABLE 10

EXPENDITURE ON HOUSING	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
UPTO 200	6	10	2	5	8
200-500	8	13	2	5	10
>500	48	77	34	90	82
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

The interaction with the construction workers revealed that some of them stay in the site and many of them stay in small rooms and a small number on the pavements. The rent amount is hardly 10% of their incomes and this clearly shows the occupational conditions in which these workers live.

TABLE 11

EXPENDITURE ON MEDICAL	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
UPTO 200	34	55	20	53	54
200-500	22	35	14	37	36
>500	6	10	4	10	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>100</b>

The % of expenditure spent on medical is very insignificant in terms of their income. A majority of 55% of male workers and 53% of the female workers spend only upto 200 rupees per month on medical expenses. They said that they have become more resistant and immune to the occupational diseases considering the poor environmental conditions surrounding their place of stay. Another important point is their anxiety to save and remit more money to their native places prevents them from spending more on housing and medicines.

TABLE 12

SAVINGS & REMITTANCE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL %
UPTO 1000	31	62	40	80	71
1000-3000	19	38	10	20	29
>3000	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>

The migrant workers are very keen on saving and remitting money to their native places. 62% of the male migrants and 80% of the female migrants are able to send upto 1000 per month. The savings of the female workers is about 15% to 30% of their salary. Some of the migrant workers send about 40% of their salaries.

TABLE 13: CONDITIONS AT WORK PLACE

Particulars	Yes %	No %
Health problems due to problems at work place	77	23
Causes of health problems, lack of hygiene, stress	100	-
Safety at work place	18	82
Security at work place	24	76
Exploited by middlemen	68	32

The above table clearly shows that majority of the workers face health problems due to unhygienic working conditions and stress. Moreover the safety and security at the work place is insufficient and a majority of the migrants are exploited by the middlemen.

### FINDINGS

1. There has been a definite shift for both male and female workers from low income bracket to a higher income bracket after migration and employment in the construction work.
2. There is a positive transition in their skill level after migration.
3. The living conditions of these migrants is not satisfactory as most of them live together in small rented houses or in the construction site, with no provision of hygienic sanitation.
4. The migrants are very keen on savings for the purpose of remitting money to their native places and they are willing to sacrifice proper accommodation and expenditure on health for the same.
5. There is exploitation of migrant labour by the middlemen, contractors and subcontractors.
6. Moreover the wages of the migrant construction workers is less than that of the local workers.
7. The Quality Work Life of the male and female migrant construction workers is not satisfactory.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The exploitation of the migrant workers has to be stopped through effective implementation of labour laws and involvement of trade unions.
2. Special care is to be taken to remove the discrimination and protection of women and children. The discrimination between male and female workers in payment of wages should be eliminated. Special health care should be provided for women and children.
3. Considering the poor living conditions of the migrant construction workers, they should be provided with decent housing with the essential amenities.
4. The Inter State Migrant Workers as well as all the construction workers should be compulsorily registered by Tamilnadu Construction Workers Welfare Board.
5. Minimum Wages Act and Equal remuneration Act should be strictly implemented.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The data has been collected during the months of February and March when construction is at its peak as there will be no rains
2. The sample consists of only 62 male and 38 female migrant construction workers.
3. Thus the findings cannot be generalized and there is further scope for research in this topic.

### SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. The Quality Work Life of the Inter State migrant labourers, both men and women and the work life balance in this occupation can be analyzed.
2. The Quality Work Life balance of Women alone can be determined.
3. The discrimination and exploitation of women migrants can be studied.
4. The betterment of the income, savings and remittances of migrant workers can be analyzed.

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