

Living Conditions and Physical Health Status of Laborers Living in Line Rooms in Idukki District

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate purpose of the study is to understand the living conditions and physical health status of laborers living in line rooms allotted for them by the estate. In this study the researcher studies about the living conditions, health status, difference between the health condition of men and women, and knowledge about Plantation Labour Act. The methodology used in the research is quantitative and the research design is descriptive. The study is conducted among tea plantation laborers living in line rooms in Semini Valley estate at Elappara. The sampling method is convenient sampling. The sample size is 50, 25 men and women each. The results of the study explain the relationship between health status and living conditions of laborers living in line rooms and difference between health conditions of men and women in the same living area. The result of the study says that even though there is an association between health status and living conditions, there is no significant relationship between the living conditions and health status of laborers living in line rooms.

KEYWORDS: Health status, Living conditions, Laborers, Line rooms, Plantation Labour Act

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INTRODUCTION

According to the state's agriculture statistics report (2016-17), 30,205 hectare of plantation area is under tea, of which Idukki district (21,950 ha) has the maximum area under tea (Report, S. A, 2011). According to the 2011 Indian Labour Bureau statistics, Kerala employs around 40,000 workers daily in 86 tea estates. A 2017 study reported that tea estate workers are among the poorest paid in Kerala at Rs 321 a day, compared to casual wage workers who earn between Rs 400-700 a day (Panwar, 2017). None of the workers has any land rights and they live in dilapidated one-room tenements referred to as 'line rooms'. Although Kerala's, or for that matter South India's, contribution to all-India production is low, it is to be noted that 41% of the South Indian tea (95.95 million kg of 233.65 million kg in 2017-18) amounting to Rs 1521.95 crore is exported to foreign countries. The tea sector is therefore seen as a major source of foreign exchange earnings for the producers and for the country. Tea producers remain quiet when they rake in profits; we only hear of the age-old adage of 'industry in crisis' which is said to be going on since the 1990s due to diminishing profits, emergence of new growers in producer countries, falling or stagnant prices and rising costs of production while the plantation owners lobby for lowering of wages and removing social welfare codes as legislated by the Plantation Labour Act (PLA, 1951). Tea is a labour-intensive industry and labour productivity has always been highlighted by most planter associations as a major determinant of yield and cost of production in each country. But land degradation and

seedling quality which also determine yield have hardly been brought to our notice. Tea statistics (2005-06) indicate that 39.8% of the tea bushes in North Indian plantations and 47.1% in those in South India are over 50 years old. In fact, the bushes that may well be over 100-150 years old (as 50 years and above is the last age of bush category used in the report) which had been planted by the British, while the economic lifespan of a bush is said to be between 50-80 years. So, instead of stagnating labour wage, planters should focus on improving productivity and quality of the tea by replacing bushes. With old tea bushes, quality and yield is bound to go down and the labour is less to blame for the yield of the tea gardens (Lama, 2018). Wages of tea plantation workers are the lowest in the formal sector and their living conditions are appalling (Bhowmik S. K., 2015). Not only are wages kept low for the tea workers, their living conditions are also not optimal, thereby impacting their overall health, standard of living and well-being (Bhowmik, 2002).

Literature gap

In Kerala today, tea plantation workers are vulnerable and face displacement due to financial insecurity. Although no loss of lives was reported in the tea estates, the workers have lost their livelihood and face hunger, disease and migration. The workers have thus been made to choose either to show up for work while leaving their homes in shambles or to re-build and recover what was lost and lose their day's wage. The need of the hour is for employers to help their workers pick

up the broken pieces of their lives after rather than just look at their losses, ignoring their years of accumulated profits invested in diversifying their businesses, and abandon or close the tea estates. Businesses should take opportunity to revamp, restructure and empower the plantation models to enable price competitiveness in an economically viable and environmentally sustainable manner. They must develop mechanisms and institutions to effectively keep track of international market developments and be cautious about price fluctuations instead of blindly running behind profits in order to avoid facing disasters. They must invest in re-plantation and uprooting of old bushes while also developing an efficient labour force by upgrading the workers' skills and education. Focus should be on providing amenities and wages to avoid facing labour shortages and to maintain a healthy and motivated labour force. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1946). So, it is important to prove that if there is a dependency on physical health status and living condition of plantation labourers in tea estates.

Problem formulation

So, when consolidating in general, the researcher gets an idea of the overall problem as follows:

- The living conditions of labourers working in tea plantation estates are appalling these days. The poor infrastructure that these workers are having in their living area makes the lives miserable for these large numbers of people of our country
- A number of strikes done by the workers bring forth the miserable living conditions of the workers in the 'line rooms' they live
- Tea plantation industry is the largest in the formal private sector with more than a thousand of workers. Most of the plantation workers are migrant labourers from other states who come to find a living
- Workers are given houses inside the plantation so that they can live with their families near the working area. Whole the family will be working in the plantation and their children will be studying in nearby schools. The poor livelihood of the workers and their insecurities are unheard in the social sector even in these 2019s
- Poor facilitation leads to many problems among them, mainly in health sector. Many people don't know how to reach proper medical care facilities
- Achieve the sanitation facilities is much more a mission that needs to be accomplished in the tea plantation sector
- Wages are kept low even though tea plantation industry is the largest in the private sector. In that women and men are not paid equally
- No proper livelihood creates the havoc of non-development for the workers decades after the Plantation Labour Act has been came. There are laws that govern and define about the living conditions that the employers must provide in the living area of workers but all those seem indifferent

Problem statement

Living Conditions and physical health status of labourers living in line rooms. The living conditions of tea plantation labourers are appalling. The employment they have doesn't

satisfy their basic and daily requirements. Health of an individual is closely related to the environment of the person he/she is related. Finding the relation between the health status and living conditions will be a milestone in providing their fundamental necessities by the employers. So, the problem can be stated as researching on the relation between the health status and living conditions of the labourers living in line rooms.

Need of the study

The 'Kerala model' of development, underpinned by education, health and robust public services has always set an example and become a template for other states to follow. The need of the hour is to provide better financial security to workers to fulfill the goal of 'decent work', along with the adoption of sustainable farming practices to protect the delicate ecology of the region. Kerala has an opportunity to re-build a strong plantation sector with the right set of policies for the rest of the country to emulate. It must work towards an all-inclusive model as the egalitarian quest of the 'Kerala model' of development was said to have been lost and Scheduled Castes, tribes, fisher folk and plantation labourers were termed as outliers in the 'model' and continued to remain marginalized.

Objective

Many of the plantation estates have migrant labourers from other states with a below poverty line measurement. None of the workers has any land rights and they live in dilapidated one- room tenements referred to as 'line rooms'. The tea plantation workers are at the lowest rung of the organizational hierarchy, surviving at subsistence wages in difficult working conditions doing delicate work of plucking and manufacturing tea while still being considered as unskilled workers. They are also highly dependent on plantations for food, drinking water, housing, education and healthcare. The enactment of the Plantation Labour Act (1951) ensured that the management would provide these to the workers while also safeguarding the rights of the workers.

General Objective

To know the living conditions and physical health status of plantation workers living in Idukki district.

Specific Objectives

1. To find out if the health status is related their living conditions
2. To find out how men and women experiencing the same living conditions and in that changes in their general health conditions
3. Whether the workers living in line rooms have enough knowledge and information about the Plantation Labour Act (1951)

Methodology

The study is conducted among tea plantation laborers living in line rooms in Semini Valley estate at Elappara. The research method used is the quantitative method which emphasizes objective measurements and statistical analysis of data collected through questionnaire using computational techniques. Descriptive design had been chosen for the same. This research focuses on whether health status is affected by the living conditions of the workers describing the conditions or phenomenon present in the area of study. Semini Valley Tea estate was selected as the universe of the research. Typically, tea workers live on tea plantations in "labour lines." Men and women living in line rooms that work in the tea plantation

were selected to be the samples of the research. Sampling method used is convenient sampling. This research is done among the tea plantation labourers also to know whether the plantation labourers have enough knowledge about the policies available for them. The line rooms are given by the plantation authority for their laborers to live and work in the plantation. Workers are ready to leave the estate because of poor housing quality and limited facilities. Most workers are from neighboring villages of Tamil Nadu and speak Tamil. This study followed all the ethical considerations and the data was analyzed by using the SPSS software. The study period was one year.

Analysis and discussion

This part is explained with the specific objectives of the study.

➤ To find out if the health status is related their living conditions

Even though they didn't much care about their health conditions, their living conditions haven't affected their health status. It shows that health status has an association with living conditions found using chi-square test. Health status and living conditions are negatively correlated to each other tested using correlation.

➤ To find out how men and women experiencing the same living conditions and in that changes in their general health conditions

The difference between health status of men and women are tested using Independent Sample T-test. In the statistical test, the hypothesis is that there is no significant difference between specified populations.

➤ Whether the workers living in line rooms have enough knowledge and information about the Plantation Labour Act (1951)

Majority of the laborers have poor knowledge about the Plantation Labour Act and people have deficient knowledge about the facilities and provisions provided for them in the Act. Even 64% of the total sample didn't hear about the Act. Any authorities from the estate or government give no information about PLA Act. Many people don't know how to reach proper medical care facilities.

Discussion and conclusion

This study is dealing about the living conditions and physical health status of laborers living in line rooms. Lack of access to safe drinking water, lack of toilet and bathroom facilities,

overcrowding, lack of waste management system, lack of proper garbage disposal areas are always a problem to laborers living in one room tenements. Together it creates a total of poor living conditions and makes the life of laborers miserable. Insecure residential status, poor housing quality, poor infrastructure is not just mere newspaper reports. Most of the plantation workers are migrant laborers from other states who come to find a living. Workers are given houses inside the plantation so that they can live with their families near the working area. Whole the family will be working in the plantation and their children will be studying in nearby schools. The poor livelihood of the workers and their insecurities are unheard in the social sector even in these 2019s. The 'Kerala model' of development, underpinned by education, health and robust public services, has always set an example and become a template for other states to follow. Plantation laborers was termed as outliers in the 'model' and continued to remain marginalized. Assessing the effects of limited living conditions helps social workers to advocate and efficiently implement schemes for line room laborers in tea estates. This research can be further used for improving practice, policy and program services for laborers living mainly in plantation and line rooms.

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