



A Study on Socio-Economic Conditions of Migrant Construction Workers in Belagavi District

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-economic conditions of migrant construction workers in Belagavi District of Karnataka State, against the backdrop of a rapidly expanding urban infrastructure sector. Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study incorporates a purposive sample of 80 of interstate and intrastate migrant labourers selected from construction sites across Belagavi City and Gokak talukas. Participants were chosen to represent the demographic and employment diversity with the assistance of labour contractors and site managers. Data collection included structured questionnaires, measuring income, education, access to basic amenities and social protection, alongside semi-structured interviews that revealed nuanced insights into the workers lived experiences. The mixed-methods approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of both structural challenges and personal resilience within the migrant labour community. Findings emphasize the socio-economic vulnerabilities rooted in informal employment, restricted access to services, and limited representation, calling for targeted interventions in labour policy and urban social welfare to improve quality of life, rights and wellbeing of the respondents.

Key Words: Socio-Economic, Migrant Construction Workers, Income, Education, Interstate, Intrastate.

1. INTRODUCTION

The movement of people from one location to another is known as migration. It links distant regions and forges new, intricate social, economic, and political ties between them. The lives of those in the communities from which migrants originate can be directly impacted by decisions made in the new locations (Bichsel, C., et al.,2005). Similarly, the term “Unorganised labour” describes workers who, for a variety of reasons, such as the irregular nature of their jobs, their lack of education and literacy, the tiny and dispersed size of their establishments, etc, have not been able to band together to pursue their shared interests. These workers make up around 93 percent of the workforce overall, and their numbers have been steadily increasing in India over time (Manoj, P. K., & Vidya, V. 2015).

In the 21st century, the Indian population is increasing very speedily, also is the world. The increasing population needs infrastructure and development to fulfil its day-to-day activities. To develop the infrastructure, the rural workers are migrating to urban areas. Large-scale development work carried out by Government or private entities also provides employment opportunities to skilled workers, semi-skilled workers and unskilled workers. Migrant workers can easily enter the construction sector due to employment opportunities. Construction works such as offices, houses, hospitals, schools, apartments, and other buildings. Urban infrastructure, highways, roads, ports, railway, airports, power system, irrigation and agricultural, telecommunications, etc.. (Raj, D., & Singh, B. P. 2018). However, all examples of construction activity are essential components of a nation's socioeconomic growth. With 3.2 crore workers nationally, India has a sizable and well-known construction sector. In general, construction workers can be divided into two categories: skilled and unskilled. Despite the ban on child labour, children are nevertheless hired for low-skilled work. Majority of the workers in industry work on a case-by-case basis.

The fundamental aspect of construction workers' jobs is unstable employment and income, as well as workplace changes. By employing a sizable workforce and making up around 9 percent of the nation's GDP, the construction sector is



essential to the expansion of the Indian economy (Shamala, B. 2018). As per the NSSO report 2024, Indian GDP growth at constant price is estimated at 7.6 percent, in 2023-24, compared to 7.2 percent in 2022-23. (National Statistical Office 2024). Moreover, nearly 60 percent of urban male migrants and 59 percent of urban female migrants had migrated from rural areas (National Sample Survey Office 2007–2008).

2. OBJECTIVES

- a) To examine the socio-economic conditions of migrant construction workers.
- b) To understand the awareness of labour laws among respondents.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

To estimate the socioeconomic condition of migrant construction workers in Belagavi district, the study uses a descriptive research design. The study is carried out in Karnataka's Belagavi district, where the region's developing construction industry has resulted in an increase in the number of migrant workers, especially in urban areas like Belagavi City and Gokak. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 80 male inter and intrastate migrant construction workers from major construction sites, and informal settlements across the district, focusing on individuals who migrated for employment from various regions. The selection criteria included diversity in age, gender, and type of employment (daily wage or contract), with assistance from site managers, and labour contractors to identify suitable participants. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires covering income, housing, education, healthcare access and social security. In parallel, semi-structured interviews provided deeper qualitative insights into workers lived experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table No.01: Age Group of Respondents and Residence

Age Group of Respondents	Residence of Migrant Construction Workers		
	Interstate	Intrastate	Total
20 to 30	18	06	24
	22.5 Percent	7.5 Percent	30 Percent
31 to 40	21	10	31
	26.25 Percent	12.5 Percent	38.75 Percent
41 to 50	09	08	17
	11.25 Percent	10 Percent	21.25 Percent
51 and above	03	05	08
	3.75 Percent	6.25 Percent	10 Percent
Total	51	29	80
	63.75 Percent	36.25 Percent	100 Percent

Source: Primary Data

Results: The study reveal that the number of migrant construction workers in the 31 to 40 category (38.75 percent) is the largest, then there are the 20 to 30 years individuals (30 percent) which indicates that the workforce is young and early middle-aged. The interstate migration is significantly greater (63.75 percent) than the intrastate (36.25 percent), and the age group 31 to 40 shows the highest interstate migration (26.25 percent). Age groups 41 to 50 and 51 to 60 have lower percentages (21.25 and 10 percent respectively) which implies that people in this age bracket would be less mobile or less prone to working as they get older. Altogether, the tendency proves that younger and middle-aged people are more willing to migrate the state borders in the search of construction jobs and this fact proves the need to introduce specific labour policies and welfare provisions to this group of citizens.

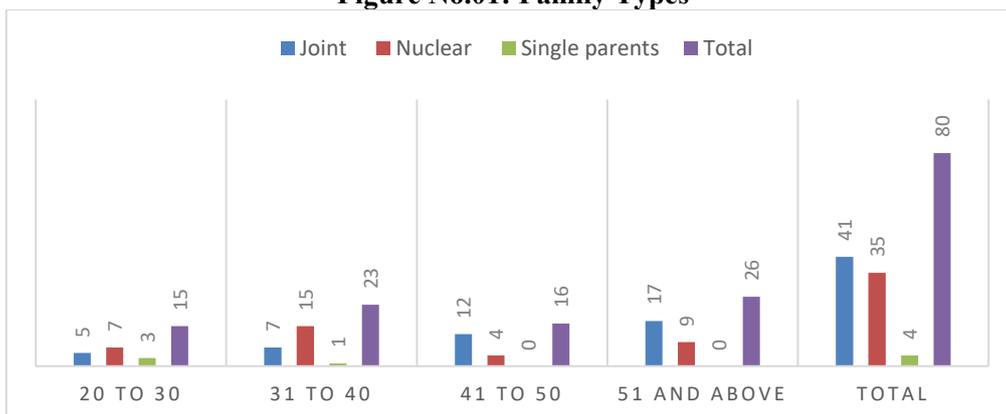
Inference: The data shows that younger workers, especially those under 40, dominate respondents, particularly in interstate migration. Older workers are fewer, likely due to the physically demanding nature of the job. Hence, age significantly influences migration patterns, with youth more willing and able to migrate long distances.

Table No.02: Age Group of Respondents and Family Types

Age Group of Respondents	Family Types			
	Joint family	Nuclear family	Single parents	Total
20 to 30	5	7	3	15
	6.25 Percent	8.75 Percent	3.75 Percent	18.75 Percent
31 to 40	7	15	1	23
	8.75 Percent	18.75 Percent	1.25 Percent	28.75 Percent
41 to 50	12	4	-	16
	15 Percent	5 Percent	-	20 Percent
51 and above	17	9	-	26
	21.25 Percent	11.25 Percent	-	32.5 Percent
Total	41	35	04	80
	51.25 Percent	43.75 Percent	05 Percent	100 Percent

Source: Primary Data

Figure No.01: Family Types



Source: Primary Data

Results: The data indicates that of 80 migrant construction workers that were surveyed, the highest number (32.5 percent) was 51 years and above, then 31 to 40 years (28.75 percent), with the other age groups having smaller proportions. The most common type of family in general (51.25 percent) and specifically more common with older workers 41 to 50 (15 percent) and 51 and above (21.25 percent) indicates that senior migrants have a traditional family set up. The nuclear families take up 43.75 percent. of the total, the majority falling within the age of 31 to 40 (18.75 percent), which indicates the potential to have a decreasing generation with smaller families. Single-parent families are uncommon (05 percent), only observed in the younger age groups, especially 20 to 30 (3.75 percent) which is a pointer to the emergent vulnerabilities among younger migrants.

Inference: The data outlined a generational shift in the structure of migrant families. Older workers are mostly from the joint family set ups and middle aged are mostly in nuclear set ups. Single-parent families is only observed in younger age groups suggesting changing social attitudes.

Table No.03 - Age Group of Respondents and Educational Status

Age Group of Respondents	Educational Status				
	Illiterate	Primary	Middle	High School	Total
20 to 30	--	7	11	13	31
	--	8.75 Percent	13.75 Percent	16.25 Percent	38.75 Percent



31 to 40	02	04	08	07	21
	2.5 Percent	05 Percent	10 Percent	8.75 Percent	26.2 Percent
41 to 50	01	07	05	04	17
	1.25 Percent	8.75 Percent	6.25 Percent	05 Percent	21.25 Percent
51 and above	03	02	04	02	11
	3.75 Percent	2.5 Percent	05 Percent	2.5 Percent	13.75 Percent
Total	06	20	28	26	80
	7.5	25	35	32.5	100

Source: Primary Data

Results: According to the data, most of the respondents have a relative level of education with 32.5 percent having completed high school and 35 percent having completed middle school with only 7.5 percent illiterate. The age group (20 to 30) is the most educated as 16.25 percent of the population has high school education, and 13.75 percent has a middle school education, which indicates increasing access to education among younger migrants. However, the situation is different with older age groups (41 to 50 and above 51 year) as the educational attainment is lower, and the proportions of primary and illiterate are higher. This change in generation implies that the younger generations of migrant workers are moving into employment with a much more significant educational background that may affect their occupational mobility and flexibility of skills.

Inference: The data shows that younger migrant construction workers have higher educational attainment compared to older ones. Illiteracy is found only among the older age groups, while the majority of younger respondents (20 to 30) have completed middle or high school. This indicates improved access to education over time and a positive generational shift in literacy levels among respondents.

Table No.04: Monthly Wages of Respondent

Age Group of Respondents	Monthly Wages of Respondent			
	5000-10000	10001-15000	15000 and above	Total
20 to 30	07	05	05	17
	8.75 Percent	6.25 Percent	6.25 Percent	21.25 Percent
31 to 40	03	07	10	20
	3.75 Percent	8.75 Percent	12.25 Percent	25 Percent
41 to 50	10	15	12	37
	12.25 Percent	18.75 Percent	15 Percent	46.25 Percent
51 and above	-	06	-	06
	-	7.5 Percent	-	7.5 Percent
Total	20	33	27	80
	25 Percent	41.25 Percent	33.75 Percent	100 Percent

Source: Primary Data

Results: The study show that the largest percentage of respondents (46.25 percent) is in the 41 to 50 age range, and the highest paying category in all wage scales is 10,001 to 15,000, 15,000 and above. In general, the wage distribution is moderate-high with 41.25 percent of respondents having the range 10,001 to 15,000 and 33.75 percent having above 15,000. The younger employees (20 to 30 age) are well-represented in terms of wage range, whereas the (31 to 40 age) population has the most representatives of the representatives of the high-earners category (12.25 percent). It is important to mention that respondents above aged 51 are limited to the 10,001 to 15,000 brackets, indicating reduced



earning potential with age and working opportunity. This wage pattern reflects both experience-based earning and possible age-related labour constraints

Inference: The majority of respondents earn between 10,001 to 15,000, especially those aged 41 to 50. Younger workers (20 to 30) show more varied income, while older workers (51 and above) fall into the mid-income group. Overall, income tends to rise with age and experience.

Table No.05: Access to Basic Amenities

Access to Basic Amenities			
Basic Amenities	YES	No	Total
Safe drinking water	61 (76.25 Percent)	19 (23.75 Percent)	80 (100 Percent)
Electricity	76 (95 Percent)	04 (05 Percent)	80 (100 Percent)
Sanitation facility	43 (53.75 Percent)	47 (58.75 Percent)	80 (100 Percent)

Source: Primary Data

Results: The data on access to basic amenities among the individuals reveals significant disparities. Electricity is the most accessible, with 95 Percent of respondents having it, indicating strong infrastructure coverage. Safe drinking water is available to 76.25 Percent, though nearly a quarter still lack this essential resource, posing health risks. Sanitation access is the most concerning, with only 53.75 Percent having facilities and 58.75 Percent lacking them suggesting a critical gap in hygiene infrastructure. These figures highlight the need for targeted interventions, especially in sanitation, to improve overall quality of life and public health outcomes.

Inference: Electricity has the highest access rate (95 Percent), indicating strong infrastructure, while sanitation shows the greatest deficiency, with 58.75 Percent lacking facilities. Safe drinking water access remains moderate, with nearly one-fourth of respondents still underserved.

Table No.06: Awareness of Labour Laws among Respondents

SI No	Labour Laws	Count		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Minimum Wages Act, 1948	27	53	80
		33.75 Percent	66.25 Percent	100 Percent
2	Employment State Insurance Act, 1948	57	23	80
		71.25 Percent	28.75 Percent	100 Percent
3	Employment Provident Fund Act, 1952	61	19	80
		76.25 Percent	23.75 Percent	100 Percent
4	Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970	47	33	80
		58.75 Percent	41.25 Percent	100 Percent
5	Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972	30	50	80
		37.5 Percent	62.5 Percent	100 Percent
6	The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976	21	59	80
		26.25 Percent	73.75 Percent	100 Percent
7		19	61	80



	The Interstate Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979	23.75 Percent	76.25 Percent	100 Percent
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Source: Primary Data

Results: The above table reveals varying levels of awareness among respondents regarding different labour laws. The highest awareness is seen for the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Act, 1952, with 76.25 Percent of respondents familiar with it, followed closely by the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Act, 1948, known by 71.25 Percent. This indicates that workers are relatively well-informed about laws related to savings and health benefits. Moderate awareness is noted for the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, with 58.75 Percent awareness. However, awareness drops significantly for other key labour laws. Only 33.75 Percent are aware of the Minimum Wages Act 1948, and 37.5 Percent know about the Payment of Gratuity Act 1972, showing limited understanding of basic wage and end of service benefits. Even more concerning is the very low awareness of the Equal Remuneration Act 1976 (26.25 Percent) and the Interstate Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979 was known to just 23.75 Percent. These figures highlight a serious gap in awareness regarding the rights of women and migrant workers. Overall, while financial and health-related laws are better known, there is an urgent need for awareness programs focusing on laws that protect vulnerable groups like migrant contract workers.

Inference: The data shows high awareness of financial and health-related labour laws like EPF and ESI among workers. However, awareness of basic wage, gender equality and migrant worker protection laws is significantly low. This indicates a critical need for targeted legal awareness programs for vulnerable worker groups.

6. FINDINGS OF STUDY

- The analysis shows that 68.75 percent of migrant construction workers were under the age of 40, which means that the youthful involvement in migration is mostly observed.
- The research also demonstrates that most workers that are aged over 51 years old are in joint families with 17 of 26 respondents implying the continuation of the family tradition in the older migrants. The 31 to 40 years age group on the other hand Favors nuclear families (15 of 23) which is a move toward smaller families. Overall, the number of joint families (41) takes up the majority of families followed by nuclear families (35) and single-parent families (4).
- Results show that the youngest migrants (20 to 30 years old) have a relatively higher educational level, as most of them have completed either middle school (11 respondents) or high school (13 respondents); no representatives of this category were found to be illiterate. The level of education declines with age, with older groups showing a greater rate on primary education and illiteracy. In general, the most popular levels are middle school (28) and high school (26), which allows concluding that the level of education of younger migrants has generally improved.
- Most of the respondents (33) say that their monthly incomes fall between 10000-15000 rupees, and this range of earnings is the most common salary range. The young working population is mainly found in the low wage levels, whilst the middle-aged working population (31 to 50 years) are found in the high-income levels. This trend is a clear indication of a connection between age and earning power in the construction industry.
- The research also states that 95 percent of respondents are accessing the electricity facility, a good provision of infrastructure has been noted. Nevertheless, access to safe drinking water is only 76.25 percent and sanitation is also a problem with only 53.75 percent reporting their access. Such conclusions highlight a dire need to upgrade the sanitation and other basic facilities in order to increase the standard of living.
- Lastly, the study shows a significant level of awareness of Employees Provident Fund Act (76.25 percent), and the Employees State Insurance Act (71.25 percent), which reflects excellent knowledge about financial and health benefits. Other labour legislative regulations, including Minimum Wages Act (33.75 -3.75 per cent) and Equal Remuneration Act (26.25 -0.25 per cent), are considerably low, which is why the specific awareness campaigns regarding the protective laws of migrant and vulnerable workers are necessary.

7. SUGGESTIONS

According to the current research, most migrant construction workers are young and have quite a high level of education; however, they face serious problems with wages and working conditions. There is a desperate need to come up with stable, more structured jobs among young migrants. More efforts should also focus on the provision of clean water, sanitation, and shelter at the workplaces. They should have extensive awareness programmes to raise awareness among workers on matters of labour legislation, with a specific focus on the Minimum Wages Act and the Equal Remuneration Act. This could be further improved through the promotion of financial literacy and skill development, which would improve their livelihoods. All in all, having more powerful welfare policies can be used to enhance their quality of life.



8. CONCLUSION

As shown in this paper, migrant construction workers in the Belagavi District are mainly comprised of the youthful population, with the younger age groups having higher educational levels. The changing nature of family structures implies that the family forms within the successive generations have evolved into joint and nuclear forms. There is an indication that income trends are on the increase with age and cumulative experience, although access to basic amenities is skewed with electricity being universal and sanitation and the supply of drinking water being lacking. Among the labour laws is a lack of awareness especially on wage rights, gender equality, and migrant workers protection. These findings highlight the vulnerabilities in socio-economic aspects and emphasize the need to target interventions in policy, welfare and education fields to mitigate the living and working conditions of workers.

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