**Working Condition of Internal Migrant Workers in Kerala: An Intertemporal Analysis**

**Abstract**

Kerala, a state identified for its high human development index, attracts a significant number of internal migrant workers from other parts of India. These workers contribute substantially to Kerala's economy, particularly in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and informal industries. However, their working conditions have been a subject of concern. This paper aims to examine the working conditions of internal migrant workers in Kerala, both in their native state and destination state, and to identify the issues related with working condition and to estimate the worker’s perception of working condition with response scales. The primary data is collected by using an interview schedule, from 400 randomly selected internal migrant workers engaged in construction sector. A multistage sampling method was adopted for the purpose. The study found that migrant workers receive higher wages in Kerala than their native place and they need to work only fewer hours than the native state. The overall perception of working condition of internal migrant workers in Kerala is comfortable as compared to their native state.

***Keywords:*** *Internal migrant worker, Working condition, Daily wage, Working hours, Working days, Native state*

**Introduction**

Migrant workers frequently encounter significant challenges, including extended working hours and inadequate access to basic facilities and healthcare services at worksites. In Kerala, these workers are employed in diverse sectors such as construction agriculture manufacturing and industry, domestic work (cleaning, cooking and childcare). Many migrant workers in Kerala are engaged in informal or unorganized sectors, characterized by lack of formal contracts and job security, low-skilled or semi-skilled work, physically demanding and often hazardous tasks, limited access to social protection including health insurance, pension, and unemployment benefits. Working conditions refer to the environment and circumstances in which employees or workers perform their jobs. The present study explores in detail the working condition of migrant workers in Kerala both in their native state (pre-migration periods) and in Kerala (post-migration period). The working condition is analysed by taking the working hours per day both in native state and Kerala, working days in a typical month in both places, wage level in pre and post migration period as well as the relationship with co-workers and employers

Interstate Migrant Workers in Kerala face poor living conditions, inadequate access to healthcare, and limited social security benefits and they experience exploitation, including low wages, long working hours, and poor working conditions (JM. Abraham and Lovelina LF, 2019). Migrant workers in Kerala have higher average monthly income compared to their native states. However, they face challenges in accessing basic amenities like housing, healthcare, and sanitation (Dilip Saikia, 2017). Migrant workers contribute significantly to Kerala's economy, particularly in the construction and informal sectors. They help address labour shortages and support economic growth in the state (N K Nair et al., 2020). Migrant workers in Kerala's construction sector face wage disparities and poor working conditions. They often work longer hours and earn lower wages compared to native workers (Sreedevi R.S. and P. Gopinath, 2018) and they lack access to social security benefits, including healthcare, pension, and unemployment benefits. There is a need for effective implementation of welfare measures to protect the rights and promote the well-being of migrant workers, Existing welfare schemes often fail to reach migrant workers due to lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic hurdles. (Remya R., 2020)

The present study attempts to analyse the working condition of migrant workers both in their native state and destination state, to identify the issues related with working condition and to estimate the perception of working condition with response scales

**Method**

The empirical part of the study was conducted at Malappuram District, Kerala where 6.24% of internal migrants of the state are residing in the district (Economic Review, 2018). According to different experts’ opinions and as per the study conducted by GIFT, construction is the main sector where interstate migrants are engaged in various parts of Kerala. So, among various employment categories construction category was selected purposively. The primary data is collected by using an interview schedule, from 400 randomly selected internal migrant workers engaged in construction sector. A multistage sampling method was adopted for the purpose.

To assess the working conditions of migrant workers, we examined several key variables, including: duration of work, the number of hours worked during a day, working days per month, wage levels, working condition issues, challenges faced by migrant workers in their work environment. We employed a longitudinal perspective to analyse changes in working conditions over time. This involved an intertemporal comparison, that is comparing data on working conditions before and after migration, estimating migrant workers' perceptions of their working conditions and issues they face. By analysing these variables and using a longitudinal approach, we gained insights into the working conditions of migrant workers and how they change over time.

The job profile of the sample workers shows that under the construction sector, workers are classified into mason, plasterer, carpenter, electricians and plumbers, etc. The analysis of primary data reveals that 75 percent of the total workers worked as masons, one who works on stones, bricks, cement, tiles etc. The next main category of employment was plasterer who works with cement and sand etc. in the study they account 17 percent and the remaining workers belongs to the work category of carpenters, electricians and plumbers. 95 percent of them are casual workers and remaining 5 percent work on contract base. Around 73 percent of them are helpers and main workers account only 27 percent and majority of them are semi-skilled workers. (Poovancheri, 2022)

**Analysis and Discussion**

At the outset, the discussion is based on the labour condition and workers’ wellbeing of the internal migrants in terms of working hours on a day and number of working days during a month. That is how many hours migrants have to work on a day and how many days they got work during a month is assessed here. Then we analysed wages of migrant labours and related issues. Finally, we move on to the other issues of migrants related to their work including difficulty in getting wage, relationship with supervisor, relationship with co-workers and perception of working conditions. The analysis of labour conditions is comparative in nature. That is, working hours, number of working days and wage rate availed in Kerala compared to their native states. Hence, we can assess the comparative benefits of internal migration from a labour point of view.

The working hours and labour regulations in Kerala differ from those in other parts of India. A comparative analysis of working hours in Kerala and migrant worker's native state can provide valuable insights into the differences in labour standards, work-life balance, and potential impacts on worker well-being. The actual hours of working in origin state and in Kerala is compared and presented in Table 1

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| Table 1 | | | | | | |
| Paired Sample Statistics on working hours in Native States and Kerala | | | | | | |
| Sl. No. | Destination | No. of Respondents | Mean Hours of Work | Std. Deviation | Average Difference | Std. Deviation of Difference |
| 1 | Kerala | 338 | 8.49 | 1.085 | -1.59 | 1.825 |
| 2 | Native State | 338 | 10.08 | 1.517 |
| Source: Field Survey | | | | | | |

The table shows that the estimated average working hours in native states was more than 10 hours, while it was nearly 8.30 hours in Kerala. The average difference in working hours of native states and Kerala was more than one and half hours. That is, comparing with Kerala, migrants had to work on an average 1.30 hours more on a day in their native place. Paired sample t-test was performed to examine whether there is any significant difference in the working hours of the native states of the internal migrants and in Kerala. Test results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the working hours in the native states of the internal migrants and in Kerala, t (337) = -16.009, p <.001. It can be inferred from the results that working hours of Kerala and that of native states of the internal migrants are different and they get considerable relaxation in working hours in Kerala.

Similarly,migrant workers in Kerala often experience changes in their work patterns, including the number of working days in a month. A comparative analysis of working days in Kerala and a migrant worker's native state can highlight differences in labour market conditions, industry norms, and potential impacts on worker income and well-being. Working days of the migrants during a month in Kerala and in their native states are presented in Table 2

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| Table 2 | | | | | |
| Working Days in Native States and in Kerala (during a typical month) | | | | | |
| Sl. No. | Working Days | Native State | | Kerala | |
| No. of Respondents | Percentage | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
| 1 | No job | 62 | 15.5 | - | - |
| 2 | 10 - 15 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 0.8 |
| 3 | 16 - 20 | 32 | 8 | 51 | 12.8 |
| 4 | 21 - 25 | 180 | 45 | 179 | 44.8 |
| 5 | 26 - 30 | 118 | 29.5 | 167 | 41.8 |
| Total | | 400 | 100 | 400 | 100 |
| Source: Field Survey | | | | | |

The table shows the distribution of working days of migrants during a month in Kerala and their native states. It is clear from the table that 15.5 percent of the sample migrant workers were unemployed in pre-migration period while, all of them were employed in post-migration period. The table also shows that there is a wide difference in number of working days availed by the migrants in their native place and in Kerala. Nearly 42% of the migrants found out jobs in the entire day of a month in Kerala, while it was merely less than 30% in their native places. Additionally, nearly 87% of the migrants got job more than 20 days during a month in Kerala. At the same time, nearly three-fourth of them identified more than 20 days of work during a month in their native places. In short, the table demonstrates that native places are skewed towards lower number of working days, while it was skewed towards higher number of working days in Kerala. Besides, average number of working days in a typical month in pre and post migration periods are estimated to compare the employment status of daily wage workers in both the periods. By comparing the average number of working days, the study aims to understand changes or differences in employment stability, opportunities, or challenges faced by daily wage workers between the two periods. The average number of working days during a typical month in native places and in Kerala is presented in Table 3.

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| Table 3 | | | | | | |
| Paired Sample Statistics on working days in Native States and Kerala | | | | | | |
| Sl. No. | Destination | No. of Respondents | Mean Days of Work | Std. Deviation | Average Difference | Std. Deviation of Difference |
| 1 | Kerala | 338 | 25.44 | 3.368 | 0.692 | 4.231 |
| 2 | Native State | 338 | 24.75 | 3.348 |
| Source: Field Survey | | | | | | |

The table shows that estimated average working days in Kerala (25.44) was greater than working days of native states (24.746). That is, average difference in working days in native states and Kerala was around one day. Paired sample t-test was performed to examine whether there is any significant difference in the working days in the native states of the internal migrants and in Kerala. Test results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the working days in the native states of the internal migrants and in Kerala, t (337) = 3.008, p =.003. It can be inferred from the results that working days in Kerala and in native states of the internal migrants are different. It suggests an improvement in working conditions of daily wage workers after migration as they get more working days in Kerala.

Improvement in the standard of living of the migrant labourer primarily determined by the realized earnings from their work rather than number of working days or working time. A comparative analysis of daily wages in Kerala and native states of migrants can provide intuition into the economic benefits of migration, wage disparities, and potential implications for worker welfare. The comparative analysis of daily wages of migrant workers in Kerala often seeks better economic opportunities, but their daily wages can vary significantly compared to their native states. The data on migrant workers revealed that the daily wage of migrants in their native places ranges between Rs.100 to Rs.500, while in Kerala the daily wage ranges between Rs. 300 to 1050. It indicates that both the minimum and maximum amount of daily wage available in Kerala is comparatively higher than that of their native states. Besides, more than 90% of the migrant workers earned an amount less than Rs. 400 from their native states, whereas 82% of the migrants realized more than Rs.600 in Kerala. Thus, the collected information revealed that migrant workers secured very high wage rate in post-migration period in comparison to their pre-migration period. The actual wage gap between native states and Kerala is assessed and presented in Table 4

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| Table 4 | | | | | | |
| Paired Sample Statistics on Daily Wages in Native States and Kerala | | | | | | |
| Sl. No. | Destination | No. of Respondents | Mean Daily Wages (in Rs.) | Std. Deviation | Average Difference | Std. Deviation of Difference |
| 1 | Kerala | 338 | 672.78 | 87.49 | 402.84 | 117.87 |
| 2 | Native State | 338 | 269.94 | 77.41 |
| Source: Field Survey | | | | | | |

The table shows that estimated average wage in Kerala (Rs.672.8) was nearly two and half times more than the average wage in native states (Rs.269.9). That is, average difference in wage is Rs.402.8, which was nearly double of the wage in native states. It can be inferred from the result that the wage difference between the native states and Kerala is the major reason for the large influx of internal migration to Kerala. Paired sample t-test was performed to examine whether there is any significant difference in the wages received by the migrants from Kerala and from the native states of the internal migrants. Test results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the wages received by the migrants from Kerala and from their native states, t(337) = 62.833, p <.001. The results indicates that wages received by the internal migrants from Kerala and from their native states are different and they got considerably very high wage rate from Kerala.

We are also concerned with other issues connected to working conditions of migrants in Kerala. Here, we dealing with issues such as difficulty to obtain wages, relationship with work supervisor, relationship with co-workers and perceptions of migrant workers on their working condition.

The casual labourers are often faced with difficulty in acquiring wages in due time. The contractors or intermediaries appoint migrants for certain works and may deceive by delaying or defaulting payments. The responses on payment difficulties of wage are collected from the migrant workers on a five-point Likert-scale with an options ranging from “always” to “never”. The responses also converted in to scores ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = always, 2 = usual and so on up to 5 = never. The collected responses of migrants revealed that nearly 96% of the migrants “never” faced with difficulty in realizing their wage, while only one percent of the migrants “always” suffered difficulty in securing their wage. The estimated score from the responses is 1965 out of 2000, which indicates that migrants were secured their wage properly in due time.

Similarly, working conditions of the internal migrants are also assessed by the personal relationship between workers and their supervisors. The workers’ response on relationship with supervisor is obtained on a three-point Likert scale. Options for responses are “cordial”, “somewhat cordial” and “not cordial”, and they are scored as 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The responses received reveals that 57% of the migrant workers keep cordial relation, 38% have somewhat cordial relation and only 5% of the workers have no cordial relation with their supervisors. The estimated score from the responses is 1008 out of 1200, which suggests that the relation between migrant workers and their supervisors keep cordial relation. The supervisors of casual workers are only temporary in nature, and the duration of work of a migrant worker with a supervisor is for a short period of time. The casual workers frequently shift the work place and employer, but they try to keep a good relationship with the supervisor. Some of the workers reported during field survey that sometimes even the supervisors helped them to find new jobs. Therefore, even after the completion of the work in a particular site they try to sustain a good relationship with the supervisors

The relationship between migrant workers and their co-workers can significantly impact their working conditions, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. In Kerala, where migrant workers are a significant part of the workforce, understanding the dynamics between migrant workers and their co-workers is crucial. The positive relationships with co-workers affect migrant workers' job satisfaction and productivity The supportive co-workers help mitigate the challenges faced by migrant workers in adapting to new work environments The workplace relationships influence migrant workers' perceptions of their working conditions and overall quality of life. The relationship with co-workers also obtained by a three-point Likert scale with options for responses are “cordial”, “somewhat cordial” and “not cordial”, and they are scored as 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The results of the responses obtained reveals that 60.8% of the migrant workers keep cordial relation, 38% have somewhat cordial relation and merely 1.3% of the workers have no cordial relation with their co-workers. The estimated score from the responses is 1038 out of 1200, which demonstrates that there is very positive relationship between migrant workers and their co-workers. and there were no serious disputes among the groups. The situation noted at the time of data collection was that workers from the same state work and live together, majority of them were friends or relatives that might be one of the reasons for the cordial relationship and absence of conflict among the workers at the worksite**.**

Migrant workers' perceptions of their working conditions play a crucial role in determining their job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being. This analysis explores how migrant workers in Kerala perceive their working conditions, including aspects such as safety and health, workload and working hours, wages and benefits, interpersonal relationships with co-workers and supervisors. Perception of migrants with regard to their working condition also attained using a three-point Likert scale with options like “comfortable”, “somewhat comfortable” and “uncomfortable” and scored 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Results of the secured responses reveals that 70% of the migrants perceived as comfortable working atmosphere, 29.8% perceived as somewhat comfortable working condition and only one internal migrant felt uncomfortable working condition. The estimated score for perception is 1079 out of 1200, which indicate that almost all the migrant workers perceived a comfortable working condition in Kerala. By understanding migrant workers' perceptions, policymakers and employers can identify areas for improvement, enhance worker satisfaction, and create a more conducive work environment.

**Conclusion**

The working conditions of migrant workers in Kerala are formed by a complex interplay of factors, including wages, working hours, monthly working days, and their relationship with the supervisors, co-workers and social security reflected in overall perception of workers. While Kerala's economy benefits significantly from migrant labour, ensuring decent working conditions and protecting the rights of these workers remains a challenge. The study found that migrant workers receive higher wages in Kerala than their native place and they need to work only fewer hours than the native state. The overall perception of working condition of internal migrant workers in Kerala is found comfortable as compared to their native state. The implementation and of labour laws and rules provide access to basic amenities and social security foster a safe and inclusive work environment to promote fair wages and reasonable working hours. By addressing these concerns, Kerala can ensure that migrant workers contribute to the state's economic growth while enjoying dignity and respect in the workplace.

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