

A STUDY ON EXPLOITATION OF IN-MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN KARNATAKA - A CASE STUDY IN BENGALURU

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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a primary data-driven investigation into the exploitation of in-migrant construction workers within Karnataka, with a specific focus on their experiences in Bengaluru. A structured close-ended questionnaire was employed to gather data from 180 in-migrant construction workers, drawn using a convenience sampling approach, with 15 workers selected from each of the 12 construction projects under study. The research aimed to shed light on the socio-economic profiles of these labourers and identify the underlying causes of their exploitation. The findings of the study reveal a grim socio-economic reality among the in-migrant workers. Their living conditions are characterized by a lack of organization, limited educational opportunities, inadequate industrial safety and insurance coverage, substandard housing, and a dearth of essential amenities, including sanitation and healthcare facilities. These conditions serve as stark markers of poverty and vulnerability. Furthermore, the absence of employment opportunities in their native regions emerged as a significant contributing factor to their migration and exploitation. By highlighting the precarious circumstances faced by in-migrant construction workers, this study offers a foundation for the development of targeted schemes and policy measures. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need to enhance the bargaining capacity and awareness of in-migrant laborers, with the ultimate aim of improving their overall well-being and reducing the exploitation prevalent within the construction industry in Karnataka.

Key words: Bengaluru, Construction, Economy, Exploitation, Karnataka, Labour, Migration.

INTRODUCTION:

India's labour landscape is profoundly shaped by the phenomenon of in-migrant labourers. These are individuals who migrate from their hometowns or rural areas to urban and industrialized regions within the country in search of employment opportunities. The motivations for migration are multifaceted, driven by economic necessity, a pursuit of better job prospects, and the promise of improved wages.

One of the most prominent sectors where in-migrant labourers are prevalent is the construction industry. As India experiences rapid urbanization and infrastructural development, the demand for construction labour has surged. In response, a constant influx of workers from various states and regions converge on cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, forming the backbone of the construction workforce.

The socio-economic profile of in-migrant labourers is often marked by stark disparities. They typically hail from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, characterized by a lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and other basic amenities. This lack of opportunity in their places of origin compels them to seek work in more economically vibrant urban centres. The challenges faced by in-migrant labourers are numerous. These individuals often live in makeshift settlements, lacking basic sanitation and proper housing. Additionally, they are vulnerable to exploitation, working long hours in hazardous conditions with little job security. Many are employed as daily wage labourers, leaving them without employment benefits or insurance coverage.

Despite their critical role in the country's development, in-migrant labourers often exist on the fringes of society. They face social and cultural challenges in integrating into the urban fabric, as they may come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This can lead to social isolation and discrimination. Efforts have been made by the government and various organizations to improve the conditions of in-migrant labourers. Schemes and policies have been implemented to address issues related to housing, healthcare, and labour rights. However, the challenges are immense, and many labourers continue to experience exploitation and subpar living conditions.

In-migrant labourers are an essential but vulnerable part of India's labour force. They play a pivotal role in the country's economic growth and infrastructure development. Addressing their challenges requires comprehensive policy measures, including improved housing, access to education and healthcare, and enhanced labour rights protection. Recognizing the contributions of these labourers and taking steps to improve their conditions is not only a matter of economic justice but also a crucial aspect of India's overall development and social progress.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Tilak Sanyal and Kingsuk Maity (2016) found that workers who migrate and their families suffer because of factors such as poor health, low educational attainment, and inadequate access to basic amenities. The survey discovered that the majority of the money sent home by migrant workers for their family members was used exclusively for debt repayment and the purchase of necessities. They cited poor socioeconomic conditions, differences in development, and wage discrepancies as the main causes of the exodus.

Tushar Dakua (2016) in his research work concluded that labour migration is viewed as a socioeconomic problem in developing nations like India. The complex social and economic problems that existed in the community were the reason behind the fast migration. The study found that because of their families' continuous presence, working people can be greatly impacted by migration.

Jacqueline Bhaba and Guy Abel (2016) determined that improved protections for children of immigrants are beginning to be offered by policy changes. The necessity for fundamental guidelines that apply to migrant children who must be integrated into local educational programs and get other services is becoming more widely recognized in society; focused efforts are required to address the needs of separated children. Children who come from different states are receiving more and more attention from migration activists and professionals.

Manu Mohan (2016) in his study found that, Kerala State's favourable climate and greater pay levels have been drawing more individuals to the region. According to the study, Kerala's labour migration is mostly caused by the state's expanding construction industry and rising housing demand. It was also discovered that the state's socioeconomic conditions suffered as a result of an increase in migration.

Ramesh, Lakshmi & Vijayakumar (2016) assert that, in a large nation like India, labour migration is unavoidable and is still doubling as a result of uneven regional growth. There would be no reason to migrate at all if everyone in every state was promised steady work and a steady salary. Unquestionably, the welfare programs of succeeding federal and state governments, such MGNREGAS and NRLM, did not fairly serve the poor. What is available to one person in one state or location may not reach others in other states in the same proportion for a variety of reasons. The government agencies require an initial migration count in order to formulate policy measures. The majority of the figures in recent years can be attributed to migrant movements, which official organizations typically underestimate. It was discovered that the issues surrounding labour migration still need to be addressed.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The exploitation of in-migrant construction workers in Karnataka, with a particular focus on their experiences in the bustling metropolis of Bengaluru, poses a grave socio-economic and humanitarian concern. These workers, often hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and seeking improved livelihoods, encounter myriad challenges that compromise their well-being. The lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and basic amenities in their native regions compels them to migrate in search of employment opportunities. However, their journey is fraught with obstacles. In-migrant labourers commonly endure substandard living conditions, labouring long hours in perilous environments with inadequate safety measures, minimal job security, and meagre wages. The socio-economic disparities they experience are stark, and their vulnerability is exacerbated by social and cultural challenges. The consequences of this exploitation are dire, impacting not only the physical and mental health of these labourers but also the overall socio-economic fabric of the region. Recognizing these issues, this research endeavours to unravel the root causes and consequences of the exploitation of in-migrant construction workers in Karnataka, thereby contributing to informed policy formulation and advocacy for their improved well-being.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To understand the socio-economic conditions of the in-migrant construction workers in Bengaluru.
- To identify the factors contributing to the exploitation of in-migrant construction workers in Bengaluru.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**Collection of Data:**

The study employs both primary data and secondary data. Secondary data concerning migration etc have been compiled from government databases, websites and publications. Primary Data involving the socio-Economic conditions and contributing factors to exploitation were collected using a close ended, structured Questionnaire through a survey. In-depth interviews and observation methods were also suitably employed. A likert scale of 1-5 was used to measure the agreeableness of the respondents to the statements/ factors.

Sampling:

A convenience sampling method was employed to select a sample of 168 in-migrant construction workers from various construction projects in Bengaluru. The sample was selected from 12 different construction sites, with 15 respondents drawn from each site. 12 responses had to be omitted eventually as they were either incomplete or incohesive.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative data collected through the structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to create profiles of the surveyed in-migrant workers and identify trends and patterns, to derive insights into the reasons for exploitation, socio-economic challenges. The findings form the basis for the research's conclusions and policy recommendations.

SOCIO - ECONOMIC PROFILE**Table 1: Socio Profile of Respondents based on Gender & Region of Migration**

Region	Scheduled Castes			Scheduled Tribes			OBCs & Others			Total		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Kalyana Karnataka	24	20	44	6	7	13	10	8	18	40	35	75
Kitturu Karnataka	14	11	25	4	3	6	6	5	11	24	18	42
Central Karnataka	4	5	9	1	2	3	0	3	3	5	10	15
Coastal Karnataka	5	4	9	2	0	2	2	1	3	9	5	14

Old Mysore Region *	8	6	14	2	1	3	3	2	5	11	11	22
Total	55	46	101	15	12	27	21	19	40	89	79	168

Source: Survey data compiled by Researcher

*Excludes Bengaluru Urban District

M – Male; F – Female; T – Total.

Table 2: Income and Land Holdings of the respondents

Region	No land				< 1 Acre				< 2 Acre				Total
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Kalyana Karnataka	34	10	8	2	4	6	3	7	0	1	0	0	75
Kitturu Karnataka	14	8	4	2	3	6	1	1	1	1	0	1	42
Central Karnataka	3	2	2	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	15
Coastal Karnataka	5	1	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	14
Old Mysore Region *	2	5	2	1	3	2	2	1	0	0	2	2	22
Total	58	26	17	6	15	16	10	11	1	2	2	4	168

Source: Survey data compiled by Researcher

1- Annual Income < 20,000; 2 – 20,000 – 50,000; 3 – 50,000 – 100,000; 4 – 100,000 & above

Table 3: Factors leading to the exploitation of In-migrant workers

Factors	Min Score	Max Score	Mean Score	Std Dev
Lack of job opportunities elsewhere	1.00	5.00	4.07	0.57
Illiteracy / Lack of education & training	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.62
Lack of organisation / Union among migrant workers	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.60
Unsafe & hazardous work conditions	1.00	5.00	3.99	0.60
Lack of basic amenities	1.00	5.00	3.93	0.59
Lack of insurance, healthcare & Govt support	1.00	5.00	3.81	0.63
Debt & financial burden	1.00	5.00	3.85	0.65
Lack of benefits & recreation	1.00	5.00	4.01	0.59
Uneven remuneration structure	1.00	5.00	3.82	0.61
Lack of job security	1.00	5.00	4.01	0.59

Average Score	3.94	0.60
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Source: Survey data compiled by Researcher

RESULTS & FINDINGS:

- The data reveals a big chunk of in-migration to Bengaluru in the context of construction workers comes from Kalyana Karnataka districts i.e., the erstwhile Hyderabad Karnataka region. More than 40% (75/168) of the in-migrant construction workers hail from this region. Kitturu Karnataka, i.e., the erstwhile Mumbai Karnataka contributes the next highest number of migrant workers in the construction sector (42-168). Central Karnataka that also includes Malnad districts of Shivamogga, Chikkamagalur and Coastal Karnataka region have 15 and 14 construction migrant workers. 22 workers were found to be from the Old Mysuru Region.
- Highest number of in-migrant workers were found to be from Scheduled Castes across regions, while Scheduled Tribes were the next in Number except for Kitturu Karnataka. Male and female workers were almost similar in number with Male workers just a little more than females.
- It was found from the interviews that there was little gender based discrimination in wage structure especially in large construction projects operated by big builders such as Sobha, Prestige etc.
- Almost all migrant workers were found to have a poor economic background with 107 workers having no land holdings. Even among land holders, persons with an annual income of over 1 lakh were 14 only.
- Close to 45% of the construction workers were having an annual income of less than 20,000. 25% of the workers(44/168) had an income less than 50,000 with little or no land.
- Economic necessity, reflected in the high mean score of 4.07, emerges as the primary driving force compelling in-migrant workers to relocate to Bengaluru, underpinned by the lack of job opportunities in their hometowns. The pressing issue of illiteracy and limited access to education and training (Mean Score: 3.87) significantly constrains their employability and prospects for upward mobility. Meanwhile, the lack of worker organizations and unions (Mean Score: 4.05) contributes to the vulnerability of these laborers, accentuating the need for collective advocacy. Unsafe and hazardous working conditions (Mean Score: 3.99) expose them to physical risks, necessitating immediate attention and enhanced safety measures. Substandard living conditions and a dearth of basic amenities (Mean Score: 3.93) exacerbate their challenges, further highlighting the need for improved housing and infrastructure. The absence of benefits and recreational opportunities (Mean Score: 4.01) impacts their quality of life. Uneven remuneration (Mean Score: 3.82) underscores wage disparities, and job security concerns (Mean Score: 4.01) add to the array of challenges faced by these workers, emphasizing the urgency of comprehensive policies to uplift and safeguard in-migrant construction workers.

- Factors with lower standard deviations, such as "Lack of job security" (0.59) and "Lack of job opportunities elsewhere" (0.57), suggest that there is a relatively high level of agreement among respondents regarding the critical importance of these issues.
- Factors with higher standard deviations, like "Lack of insurance, healthcare & Government support" (0.63) and "Unsafe & hazardous work conditions" (0.60), indicate that respondents' opinions are more diverse in assessing the extent of these issues.

CONCLUSION:

First and foremost, the data exposes the geographic origins of in-migrant workers, with a significant proportion hailing from the Kalyana Karnataka and Kitturu Karnataka regions. More than 40% of the surveyed workers come from Kalyana Karnataka, highlighting the economic disparity and lack of employment opportunities in these areas. It is crucial to acknowledge that these workers migrate to Bengaluru not by choice but due to economic necessity driven by the scarcity of jobs in their native regions. This economic compulsion is further underscored by the finding that a substantial number of in-migrant workers have no land holdings and meagre annual incomes.

The study also highlights the prevalence of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe workers among in-migrants, particularly from Kalyana Karnataka, further emphasizing the socio-economic vulnerability of these communities. Despite gender disparities being relatively low in wage structures, the economic challenges faced by both male and female workers are striking. These challenges often lead to in-migration and the pursuit of employment in the construction sector.

The factors contributing to exploitation, as determined by mean scores, underscore the critical need for policy interventions. While economic necessity ranks as the most significant factor, issues such as illiteracy, lack of job security, and the absence of worker organizations and unions are closely behind. Unsafe and hazardous working conditions further exacerbate the vulnerabilities of these workers. These findings call for comprehensive policy measures aimed at improving job security, providing access to education and training, enhancing safety measures, and fostering the formation of worker organizations.

The exploitation of in-migrant construction workers in Bengaluru is a multifaceted issue influenced by economic necessity, educational disadvantages, and unsafe working conditions. These workers migrate in search of livelihoods, often leaving behind impoverished backgrounds. Addressing their challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that includes improving job security, educational access, safety measures, and advocacy for workers' rights. This study serves as a critical step toward informed policy formulation, aiming to uplift and safeguard the well-being of in-migrant construction workers in Bengaluru, thereby contributing to a more equitable and just society. It is imperative that policymakers, labour agencies, and civil society work collectively to address these concerns and ensure the protection and empowerment of these labourers who play an indispensable role in building our cities.

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