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Workplace Challenges Faced By Migrant Workers In Garments Sector

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ABSTRACT

The garments sector is a key driver of economic growth in many developing countries, heavily reliant on a labor force that includes a significant proportion of migrant workers. Despite their contribution, migrant workers in this industry often face numerous workplace challenges that affect their well-being and productivity. This study explores the multifaceted issues confronting migrant workers in the garments sector, including low wages, long working hours, inadequate living conditions, lack of legal protection, discrimination, and limited access to healthcare and social services. Through a review of existing literature and case studies, the research highlights the structural and systemic barriers that perpetuate these challenges. The findings aim to inform policymakers, labor rights organizations, and industry stakeholders to foster more equitable and sustainable working conditions for migrant workers. Addressing these issues is essential not only for upholding human rights but also for enhancing the overall efficiency and ethical standards of the garments industry.

Keywords: Migration, Workplace challenges, Migrants, Work environment, Living arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

Migration refers to the movement of people from one location to another, often for better economic prospects. Typically, individuals leave their hometowns seeking improved income opportunities. However, migration can also be driven by various other factors such as ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, political instability, economic challenges, or the pursuit of a better quality of life and enhanced social and economic opportunities to regions offering greater prospects. In India, migration between states has become so widespread that it significantly affects various aspects of life. For many unskilled and semi-skilled individuals, migration is a necessity due to the difficulty of finding suitable employment locally. A large

number of these migrants, engaging in informal sector activities either as wage laborers or in self-employment.

Migration of workers is often viewed as an economic issue, although non-economic factors also have some influence. Worker migration is generally defined as cross-border movement for employment and the pursuit of a better standard of living abroad, despite the lack of a universally accepted definition. The term “migrant workers” is commonly used to refer to those who relocate specifically for employment purposes. Workers may choose to migrate when facing financial hardship and insecurity. Migrant workers play an essential role in the production of ready-made garments and have been drawn to the garment industry for stable job opportunities. However, they often face significant challenges in the workplace, including exploitation and discrimination.

The garment industry in India plays a crucial role in the country’s development. India is the second-largest producer of textile fibers globally and ranks first in the production of cotton and jute. Every year, India produces millions of tons of textile fibers across nearly nine garment sectors, making it the world’s second-largest textile manufacturer.

India’s garment manufacturing industry requires a substantial workforce. Numerous unskilled and illiterate workers migrate to garment hubs seeking better employment opportunities. This sector plays a crucial role in providing livelihoods to these migrant workers through job opportunities. This study focuses on examining the working and living conditions of migrant labourers employed in India’s garment industry.

Statement of the Problem

Migrant workers face numerous challenges that hinder their well-being and integration into society. Beyond the physical demands of their jobs, they often encounter language barriers, cultural differences, and limited access to social services, which exacerbate feelings of isolation. Discrimination in the workplace is common, ranging from wage disparities and unsafe working conditions. This study aims to explore the experiences of migrant workers, highlighting the factors that influence to migrate and challenges they face. The findings will help design more inclusive policies and strategies that promote equality, improve working conditions, and foster social integration for migrant workers.

Objectives of the study

- To find demographic conditions of migrant workers in garments sector.
- To analyze the factors influencing towards migration.
- To examine the challenges faced by migrant workers in the workplace.
- To offer valuable suggestion to migrant workers working in garment sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on primary data collected through questionnaires from 120 migrant workers within the Tirupur garments industry. The questionnaire design is built up to know the factors influencing towards migration, challenges faced by them in the workplace. Secondary sources have been used to collect information about migration of workers through Journals, Articles and Research reports were reviewed to get the insight of the previous interventions.

Data Collection

The task of data collection being after a research problem has been defined and research design and plan. While deciding about the method of data collection to be used for the study research, should keep in mind two types of data.

Area of the Study

The population of this study consists of migrant workers operating in garments sector in Tirupur City.

Tools used to data collection

- For the Study Questionnaire was the main and important tool for collection of the data. Hence, effort has been taken to construct the questionnaire in a systematic way as to include adequate and relevant questions to ensure the research objectives.
- Percentage analysis was done with the collected data.
- Chi square test
- Likert Scale
- Henry Garret Ranking
- The data collected will be tabulated in the form of charts and graphs will be used to present data. The resulting tables, charts and graphs will be analysed, and inference will draw.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attah Otu, B., Sengupta, A., & McAleavy, T. (2024)¹ in “There and back again: Dynamics of Temporary Labor Migration” explore the patterns and impacts of temporary labour migration from rural India. The study highlights how economic distress, limited local job opportunities, and seasonal demand drive rural workers to migrate temporarily to urban and industrial areas. It emphasizes that these migrations are often circular, with workers returning home periodically. Migrants face harsh working conditions, low wages, and limited access to social protections. The research also examines the impact on families left behind, including disruptions to education and healthcare. It calls for policies supporting better working conditions, stronger rural economies, and social protection to reduce migration-related vulnerabilities. This study offers valuable insights into the complex realities of temporary labour migration in India.

Muktiair and Sharma (2024)² explore the experiences of migrant workers from Assam living in Bengaluru, focusing on their struggles with work, housing, and social belonging. The study highlights that these workers often engage in low-paid, insecure jobs in the informal sector, with limited access to social security and labour rights. They face challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination, which further isolates them in the city. Poor living conditions, overcrowded housing, and lack of basic services add to their hardships. Despite these challenges, migrants develop informal support networks within their communities. The authors emphasize the need for inclusive urban policies that address the specific needs of northeastern migrant workers.

Sarkar (2021)³ examines the employment conditions of migrant male workers from Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, employed in India's construction industry. The study highlights the precarious nature of their work, marked by low wages, long working hours, and unsafe working environments. Migrants often lack formal contracts and social security, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. The research also finds that workers rely heavily on labour contractors for employment, which further limits their bargaining power. Poor living conditions at worksites, along with irregular income, worsen their socio-economic status. Sarkar calls for stronger labour protections, better enforcement of labour laws, and improved social security measures to safeguard the rights of migrant construction workers.

Percentage Analysis Table-1 Reason for Migration

S.NO	REASONS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Higher wages	26	21.7
2.	Better job opportunities	28	23.3
3.	Lack of employment in home region	38	31.7
4.	Influence of family/friends	20	16.7
5.	Better living conditions	8	6.7
6.	Total	120	100

From the above table, it is interpreted that 31.7% of the respondents are migrated due to lack of employment in home region, followed by 23.3% of the respondents are better job opportunities, followed by 21.7% of the respondents are higher wages, followed by 16.7% of the respondents are influence of family/friends and 6.7% of the respondents are better living conditions.

It was concluded that most of the respondents 31.7% of the respondents are migrated due to lack of employment in the home region.

Percentage Analysis Table-2 Living Arrangements

S.NO	LIVING ARRANGEMENTS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Company-provided housing	15	12.5
2.	Shared rental	45	37.5
3.	Individual rental	58	48.3
4.	Others	2	1.7
5.	Total	120	100

The above table represents that 48.3% of the respondents are living in individual rental, followed by 37.5% of the respondents are shared rental, followed by 12.5% of the respondents are company provided housing and only 1.7% of the respondents are living in their own houses.

It was concluded that most of the respondents 48.3% of the respondents are living in individual rental house.

Chi-Square Table-1 The relationship between gender and whether they migrated voluntarily or due to necessity

Gender of the respondents * Did you migrate voluntarily or due to necessity Crosstabulation				
		Did you migrate voluntarily or due to necessity		Total
		Voluntarily	Due to necessity	
Gender of the respondents	Male	49	37	86
	Female	19	15	34
Total		68	52	120

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.012 ^a	1	.913		
Continuity Correction ^b	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.012	1	.913		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.536
Linear-by-Linear Association	.012	1	.914		
N of Valid Cases	120				

Degree of freedom = (r-1) (c-1)

$$= (2-1) (2-1)$$

$$= 1$$

Chi-Square 5% significance 1df = .012.

Since, the calculated value of chi – square value (.012) is lesser than table value (3.84) at 5% level of significance. It is not significant and null hypothesis is accepted.

Hence, this study concluded that the gender of the respondent has no significant relationship between whether they migrated voluntarily or due to necessity.

Chi-Square Table-2 The relationship between marital status and their living arrangements

Marital status of the respondent * What were their living arrangements Crosstabulation					
		What were their living arrangements			
		Company-provided housing	Shared rental	Individual rental	Others
Marital status of the respondent	Married	6	10	40	1
	Unmarried	9	35	18	1
Total		15	45	58	2

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.590 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	23.571	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.881	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	120		

Degree of freedom = (r-1) (c-1)

$$= (4-1) (2-1)$$

$$= 3$$

Chi-Square 5% significance 3df = 22.590.

Since, the calculated value of chi – square value (22.590) is greater than table value (7.81) at 5% level of significance. It is significant and null hypothesis is rejected.

Hence, this study concluded that the marital status of the respondents has significant relationship between their living arrangements.

Likert Scale Table – 1 Working Conditions and Benefits

FACTORS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Medical benefits and Insurance	52 (43.3%)	32 (26.7%)	18 (15.0%)	14 (11.7%)	4 (3.3%)	120
Pay for overtime	45 (47.5%)	44 (36.7%)	20 (16.7%)	5 (4.2%)	6 (5.0%)	120
Working for long time without break	5 (4.2%)	23 (19.2%)	42 (35.0%)	30 (25.0%)	20 (16.7%)	120

Working atmosphere	20 (16.7%)	37 (30.8%)	35 (29.2%)	23 (19.2%)	5 (4.2%)	120
Income Satisfaction	40 (33.3%)	49 (40.8%)	16 (13.3%)	11 (9.2%)	4 (3.3%)	120
Living Conditions	19 (15.8%)	36 (30.0%)	36 (30.0%)	21 (17.5%)	8 (6.7%)	120

The above table shows that 43.3% of the respondents are strongly agree that, medical benefits and insurance provided by the company, followed by 26.7% of the respondents are agree that, medical benefits and insurance provided by the company, followed by 15.0% of the respondents are neutral that, medical benefits and insurance provided by the company, followed by 11.7% of the respondents are disagree to the medical benefits and insurance provided by the company and 3.3% are strongly disagree that, medical benefits and insurance provided by the company.

From the above table, it is inferred that 47.5% of the respondents are strongly agree that, pay for overtime, followed by 36.7% of the respondents are agree that, pay for overtime, followed by 16.7% of the respondents are neutral that, pay for overtime, followed by 5.0% of the respondents are disagree that, pay for overtime and 4.2% of the respondents are strongly disagree that, pay for overtime.

From the above table, it is inferred that 35.0% of the respondents are neutral that, working for long hours without break, followed by 25.0% of the respondents are disagree that, working for long hours without break, followed by 19.2% of the respondents agree that, working for long hours without break, followed by 16.7% of the respondents are strongly disagree that, working for long hours without break and 4.2% of the respondents are strongly agree that, working for long hours without break.

The above table shows that 30.8% of the respondents are agree that, working conditions, followed by 29.2% of the respondents are neutral that, working conditions, followed by 19.2% of the respondents are disagree that, working conditions, followed by 16.7% of the respondents are strongly agree that, working conditions and 4.2% of the respondents are strongly disagree that, working conditions.

The above table shows that 40.8% of the respondents agree that, income satisfaction, followed by 33.3% of the respondents are strongly agree that, income satisfaction, followed by 13.3% of the respondents are neutral that, income satisfaction, followed by 9.2% of the respondents are disagree that, income satisfaction and 3.3% of the respondents are strongly disagree that, income satisfaction.

From the above table, it is inferred that 30.0% of the respondents are agree and neutral that, living conditions, followed by 17.5% of the respondents are disagree that, living conditions, followed by 15.8%

of the respondents are strongly agree that, living conditions and 6.7% of the respondents are strongly disagree that, living conditions.

Henry Garret Ranking Table – 1 Challenges faced by migrant workers

CHALLENGES	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	RANK
Low wages	2002	1827	918	1288	481	161	6677	2
Long working hours	847	630	594	1012	1443	621	5147	5
Unsafe working condition	385	1260	2376	1380	370	253	6024	4
Lack of job security	3234	2520	702	276	259	276	7267	1
Verbal/Physical abuse	770	315	648	506	1295	1081	4615	6
Discrimination	1771	1008	1404	1150	518	368	6219	3

The above table sources that Garret score value and ranking. Firstly, the Garret rank is calculated by using appropriate garret ranking formula. Then based on the Garret ranks the Garret table value is ascertained. The Garret value is given in which are multiplied to record garret scores in table.

Finally, by adding each row the total garret score is obtained. Then the garret score is ranked according to their values:

The first rank is given to “**Lack of job security**”.

The second rank is given to “**Low wages**”.

The third rank is given to “**Discrimination**”.

The fourth rank is given to “**Unsafe working condition**”.

The fifth rank is given to “**Long working hours**”.

The sixth rank is given to “**Verbal/Physical abuse**”.

The highest score is awarded to “Lack of job security”, the least score is awarded to “Verbal/Physical abuse”.

CONCLUSION

Migrant workers are increasingly choosing employment in the garment industry due to the promise of consistent job opportunities and wages. Many remain in these jobs for extended periods, driven by a sense of recognition, increased responsibility, and positive relationships with both management and co-workers. However, language barriers and cultural differences often hinder their integration into the local workforce, deepening their social and professional isolation. Despite their significant contributions to the industry's growth, migrant workers frequently face disadvantages stemming from weak labour protections and limited awareness of their legal rights. Addressing these issues by ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to basic rights is essential—not only for the well-being of the workers but also for the long-term productivity and sustainability of the Tirupur garment sector.

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