



Health Conditions Of Migrant Workers - A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract: A current sociological perspective examines the health status of migrant workers. Migration is defined as the movement from one place to another to meet the necessities of life. Migration is a phenomenon that occurs in situations such as war, invasion, famine, etc. This study highlights how the socio-economic factors, conditions and access to health care of migrant workers shape their overall well-being. Migrant workers, who are often engaged in demanding and low-wage jobs such as agricultural, construction and manufacturing, face increased vulnerability to health risks, including respiratory problems, occupational accidents and infectious diseases. Many migrants are left without adequate medical care or health insurance. Migrant workers face isolation, discrimination and unstable living conditions, which contribute to physical and mental health challenges. This study highlights the need for a comprehensive health policy framework. It addresses social protection for these vulnerable workers across India. Such measures are needed to improve the physical and mental health of the migrant population in a rapidly urbanizing country.

Keywords: Migrants, Socio-Economics, Employment, Health Status.

Introduction

Migrant workers constitute a vulnerable segment, facing a range of health challenges rooted in social and structural inequalities. These workers, particularly in regions such as India, migrate in search of economic opportunities but often face deplorable working and living conditions, which exacerbate their health risks (Singh, 2020). Migrant journeys often involve socio-economic hardships, contributing to occupational hazards, limited healthcare access and exposure to diseases, creating a pressing public health concern that requires a social lens (Desai, 2018). A sociological perspective on the health status of migrant workers emphasises the role of social determinants such as class, gender, ethnicity and legal status in shaping health inequalities. According to Bourdieu's theory of social capital, "migrant workers often lack the networks and resources necessary to navigate the health system in unfamiliar environments", further marginalising them in such societies (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, structural barriers such as language, discrimination, and precarious employment prevent access to preventive care, leading to a higher prevalence of infectious diseases, mental health problems, and chronic conditions (Verma et al., 2019). This focus on social capital highlights the importance of supportive networks, which, if absent, negatively impact health outcomes. The health challenges faced by migrant workers are compounded by institutional and policy gaps. As Bhagat and Mohanty (2021) note, current labor policies overlook the unique health needs of migrant populations, leading to inadequate access to health services and a lack of adequate protection in their work environments. Furthermore, the unstable nature of migrant workers' employment and residence further complicates their access to health care, as health services in such communities are often inaccessible to those without formal residence or employment documentation (Kumar, 2017). These barriers underscore

the need for a comprehensive understanding of migrant health issues that integrates sociological insights and calls for structured interventions. By applying a sociological framework, this paper aims to explore the intersection of conditions and health inequalities among migrant workers, underscoring the need for informed policies that address these challenges. This approach not only sheds light on the health consequences of social inequalities but also advocates for policy changes to support equitable health access and improve the quality of life of migrant workers in such countries.

Concepts and Definition

- **As mentioned by Bhairappa k. According to Donald J. Bogue:** "Migration is the response of human beings to economic, social and demographic forces in the environment."
- **According to Allen G. Johnson:** "The physical movement of people within or between social systems can be called migration."
- **According to WHO:** "Health is the true wealth", this is literally true and everyone is aware of this. Without health, a person cannot achieve anything. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defines "Health is not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. It is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being."

Review of Literature

Nirmala, C. J. & Prasad, S. D.(2019). This is a cross-sectional study conducted at two construction sites in south Bengaluru. All the workers were enrolled as study subjects. Data were collected using a pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire for this study. Raichur district in North Karnataka experiences 50% injury prevalence. 8% musculoskeletal problems, 50% respiratory problems and gastrointestinal infections are reported to be high among unskilled and semi-skilled construction workers. Health education and other preventive strategies are needed to control the same. Measures to improve the working environment are needed.

Banerjee, M., Shah, M., & Thapa, P.(2015). In a study on resource utilization, cost savings and skin disease in construction among male migrant workers, the average monthly income of the workers was Rs. 7000 while the farmers from their native states were mostly unskilled and some were semi-skilled. The prevalence of skin disease among them was 38.9%. All of them had low health service utilization and did not have health insurance. The savings on health were only approximately Rs. 1000-1200 per month. The employees expressed concerns about lack of savings, insurance coverage and lack of social security.

Ashok, S., & Thomas, N. (2014) In a study titled Problems of Inter-State Migrant Workers in India, it was found that migrant workers are forced to face social and economic discrimination. They face polluted environment and poor housing conditions at the destination place. And they are anti-social in that their activities at the destination place are on the other hand not knowing who they are, where they come from and what exactly they do. We understand these through case studies and primary survey.

Objectives of the study

- To study the health status of migrant workers.
- To understand the problems and challenges of migrant workers.
- To study the specific factors that contribute to ill health.

Research Methodology: The present study is mainly a sociological perspective on the health status of migrant workers. The research methodology followed for this article is literature review and analysis of secondary data. Data were collected from various published sources, books, journals, government reports, research articles, websites, newspapers, and reports on the development of health of migrant workers, mainly based on secondary data to achieve the research goals and objectives.

Analysis

I. Health status of migrant workers

The health status of migrant workers in India is often compromised due to their working and living conditions. Migrant workers, especially those in low-income, labor-intensive jobs, often experience

inadequate access to healthcare and are more susceptible to infectious diseases (Sharma and Sharma, 2020). Studies suggest that their living environments often lack basic sanitation, making them vulnerable to infections and respiratory illnesses (Sengupta, 2019). Additionally, many migrant workers face mental health challenges due to isolation, economic insecurity, and the stress of separation from their families (Rajan and Bhagat, 2021). Migrant workers in India, especially those in low-income and labor-intensive jobs, often face significant health risks due to poor working and living conditions. The challenges they face are exacerbated by inadequate access to healthcare, poor sanitation, and economic insecurity, contributing to physical and mental health problems.

1.1 Inadequate access to healthcare

A significant barrier to the health care of migrant workers is their limited access to formal healthcare services. Many workers work informally and lack affordable healthcare options due to lack of health insurance. This lack of coverage is particularly problematic in rural or underserved areas where most migrants are employed. Financial constraints further limit their ability to access care, as workers are unable to afford private healthcare and avoid seeking medical care due to high out-of-pocket costs (Sharma and Sharma, 2020).

1.2 Infectious diseases

The living conditions of migrant workers, characterized by overcrowding and inadequate sanitation, make them highly vulnerable to infectious diseases. Many migrant workers live in slums or makeshift shelters and have limited access to clean water and sanitation. This contributes to the spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera and dysentery. Additionally, workers in industries such as construction and mining are at risk for respiratory diseases including tuberculosis (TB) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) due to exposure to dust and harmful chemicals (Sengupta, 2019).

II. Mental health challenges

Migrant workers also face significant mental health challenges. Isolation, isolation, and economic insecurity from families create heightened feelings of stress and anxiety. Many workers experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders due to long hours, harsh working conditions, and lack of social support (Rajan and Bhagat, 2021). Mental health services for migrants are often inadequate, as few resources are available in rural or industrial areas, and social stigma around mental health discourages seeking help.

III. Vulnerable populations

Certain groups of migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to health problems. Female migrant workers, for example, face gender-specific challenges, including reproductive health problems and increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Child laborers are at risk of malnutrition, disease, and physical abuse. Additionally, workers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are at increased risk of poor health due to inadequate access to nutrition, clean water, and health services.

Problems and Challenges of Migrant Workers

Migrant workers in India face several health challenges. Lack of health insurance, limited access to primary health care, and language barriers in some areas make it difficult for them to seek timely treatment (Nair et al., 2019). Migrants are exposed to workplace hazards, including unsafe working conditions and long working hours, leading to fatigue and occupational injuries (Desai and Pandya, 2022). These problems are compounded by socioeconomic factors, as many migrant workers are part of marginalized communities with limited rights and protections under the law. (Bhagat, 2021).

Migrant workers in India face health-related challenges that severely affect their well-being. One of the most significant problems is the lack of health insurance, which limits their access to formal health services. Most migrant workers, especially those in informal employment sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic work, are excluded from government health schemes and employer-provided insurance. As a result, they often cannot access medical treatment, leading to delayed diagnosis and inadequate care. In addition, migrants face significant barriers to accessing primary health services due to factors such as geographical distance from health facilities, lack of transportation, and the absence of local documentation that allows them to register for services. Language barriers further exacerbate the difficulty of accessing medical care, particularly in urban areas where migrants temporarily reside. These barriers put migrant workers at greater risk of preventable diseases and untreated health conditions (Nair et al., 2019).

In addition to limited health care, migrant workers are also more vulnerable to workplace hazards that affect their health. Unsafe working conditions, such as toxic chemicals, hazardous materials, and extreme weather, are prevalent in sectors such as construction, mining, and manufacturing. These working conditions, combined with long working hours and physically demanding jobs, contribute to fatigue, musculoskeletal disorders, and occupational injuries. Migrant workers face increased risk of respiratory diseases, including tuberculosis and silicosis, due to prolonged exposure to dust and fumes. Socioeconomic factors further compound these challenges, as many migrant workers belong to marginalized communities, often with limited rights and protections under Indian labor laws. Without adequate legal protections or access to workers' compensation, they are vulnerable to exploitation and unable to access benefits or legal recourse in the event of illness or injury (Desai and Pandya, 2022; Bhagat, 2021). These systemic problems contribute to the poor health outcomes experienced by migrant workers and underscore the need for comprehensive policy interventions that address both health access and working conditions.

Factors contributing to ill health

A number of factors contribute to ill health among migrant workers. Poor living conditions, such as overcrowded housing with confined spaces, increase the risk of respiratory and infectious diseases (Ravi et al., 2020). Furthermore, inadequate nutrition due to low wages affects their immune response, making them more susceptible to diseases (Prakash, 2021). Psychological stress from job insecurity and discrimination affects their physical health, as chronic stress is linked to cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems (Rajan and Bhagat, 2021). Migrant workers in India face several factors that contribute significantly to their ill health, primarily resulting from poor living conditions and inadequate access to basic necessities. The most pressing issue is overcrowded housing, often found in informal settlements or temporary shelters where migrants live. These accommodations often lack proper ventilation, clean water, and sanitation, creating ideal conditions for the spread of infectious diseases. Respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are particularly common in these living environments due to high levels of dust, pollution and poor air quality (Ravi et al., 2020).

In addition, crowded conditions increase the likelihood of water-borne diseases, as access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities is limited. The combination of these factors not only increases the vulnerability of migrant workers to infectious diseases, but also exacerbates the spread of illness in these communities, where access to healthcare is often limited. In addition to poor living conditions, migrant workers often suffer from inadequate nutrition, which further compromises their health. The low wages paid to most migrant workers mean that they struggle to obtain adequate and nutritious food, leading to malnutrition and weakened immune systems. This nutritional deficiency makes workers more vulnerable to diseases and infections, as their bodies have a reduced ability to fight off diseases. Chronic malnutrition is linked to a number of health conditions, including anemia and stunted growth. Aside from physical health, psychological stress plays a significant role in the overall well-being of migrant workers. Job insecurity, long working hours, and the pressure to support families contribute to high levels of stress. This chronic stress is linked to a range of physical health problems, including cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal disorders, and weakened immune responses. Furthermore, discrimination based on their migration status, gender, or ethnicity can increase feelings of isolation and exacerbate mental health conditions, contributing to a vicious cycle of physical and mental health deterioration (Rajan and Bhagat, 2021; Prakash, 2021). These overlapping factors highlight the multifaceted nature of the health challenges faced by migrant workers, calling for comprehensive policies that address their physical and mental health needs.

Health development scheme reports

The Government of India and various NGOs have launched health development initiatives targeting migrant workers. For example, the "Ayushman Bharat" scheme aims to provide healthcare to vulnerable populations, including migrants, although its reach and effectiveness for this group are limited (Mohan et al., 2021). The "Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)" also extends some benefits to migrant workers, although logistical challenges prevent the utilization of these resources (Desai and Pandya, 2022). Various NGOs, such as the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), work to improve access to healthcare for migrant populations with some success in urban areas (Sharma and Sharma, 2020).

Economic status of migrant workers

Migrant workers often occupy low-wage informal sector jobs, which leads to economic vulnerability. This low economic status exacerbates their health risks, as they cannot access medical care or nutritious food (Ravi et al., 2020). Many lack job security and some face theft or delayed payments for wages, which

hinders their ability to seek timely healthcare (Prakash, 2021). Economic stress can also motivate migrant workers to prioritize work over health, delaying treatment and worsening outcomes (Nair et al., 2019).

Migrant workers in India often work in low-wage, informal sector jobs, which leaves them economically vulnerable. They are unable to access basic needs, including healthcare and proper nutrition. These workers are often excluded from formal labor protections, such as job security, paid leave, and health insurance, which further intensifies their economic stress. The nature of informal employment means that many workers do not have a stable or predictable income, and they are often subject to wage theft or delayed payments. This uncertainty makes it difficult for migrant workers to plan their finances or allocate money for health services when needed. As a result, many migrant workers are unable to access essential medical treatment or prescription medications, which leads to a deterioration in their health over time. The inability to buy enough food affects their nutrition, resulting in deficiencies that weaken their immune systems and make them more susceptible to illness (Prakash, 2021).

Economic vulnerability leads migrant workers to prioritize work over their health, delaying or forgoing medical care to avoid losing income. In many cases, migrant workers are employed in physically demanding jobs such as construction, factory work, or agriculture. Where taking time off due to illness can result in loss of pay or even losing their job. This lack of financial security motivates workers to continue working even when they are sick. Their health conditions worsen and lead to chronic diseases that could be prevented or managed with timely medical care (Nair et al., 2019). The economic pressures of supporting families in their home countries also contribute to this trend, as workers are more concerned with earning enough to send money home than addressing their own health needs. This economic pressure not only affects their physical well-being but also contributes to stress and mental health problems, creating a cycle of vulnerability that is difficult to break without systemic changes in labor rights and access to healthcare for migrant workers.

Research findings

- Migrant workers' housing often has dirty air, polluted water and unhygienic conditions, all of which are factors that contribute to ill health.
- Migrant workers are more susceptible to infectious diseases, infections and respiratory illnesses as they often lack basic sanitation.
- Migrant workers are working informally and lack health insurance, leaving them without affordable healthcare facilities.
- The "Ayushman Bharat" scheme, which is a joint initiative of the "Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana" and the Public Health Foundation of India, aims to provide healthcare to vulnerable populations, including migrants, although its reach and effectiveness for this group is limited.
- Since migrant workers often occupy low-wage jobs, they are economically vulnerable, which exacerbates health risks, as they cannot afford medical care or nutritious food. Many face theft or delayed payments of wages due to lack of job security.

Recommendations

- Programs should be organized to increase information and awareness regarding health among migrant workers
- Social support systems should be created for migrant workers who have health problems at the place of employment.
- Basic amenities should be provided at the place of work of the workers.

Conclusion

A sociological perspective on the health status of migrant workers has highlighted the complex interplay between structural factors, social determinants and individual experiences. Migrant workers face significant challenges due to their precarious socio-economic status, limited access to health care and the pressure to adapt to a new environment. These challenges are compounded by systemic barriers including discrimination, inadequate housing, unsafe working conditions and legal restrictions on accessing public services. Improving the health status of migrant workers requires a multifaceted approach. This can include advocating inclusive policies, enhancing workplace safety, providing culturally competent health care, and addressing the root causes of social and economic inequalities. By adopting a sociological lens, we can better understand the complex factors that affect the health and well-being of migrant workers and ensure a more just society.

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