

Well-being and Susceptibility of Interstate Migrants in India: A Study of Kerala's Migrant Construction Workers from West Bengal

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Abstract: Socio-economic disparity in spatial development in a vast country like India catalyses interstate labour migration, transposing thousands of migrant workers into unfamiliar cultural and social settings. Focusing mainly on migrant construction workers from West Bengal moving to Kerala, this article examines the well-being and susceptibility of Bengali migrants. Based on a field survey in Kerala, the study shows that Bengali migrant workers in construction activities get the highest wage rate in India. The majority of them find work regularly. Most Bengali migrants reside in rented accommodations in place of construction sites, as confirmed by many other micro-studies in India. The language barrier among Bengali migrants is a huge problem. It increases Bengali migrants' vulnerability, particularly in finding jobs, bargaining power for equal wages, and accessing Kerala's public health care system.

Keywords: Migrant workers, Kerala, Language barriers, Living conditions, West Bengal

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Introduction

In India, internal labour migration happens on a large scale. According to the Census of India, 33.0 million people had migrated for employment-related reasons in 2001, and the number further increased to 51.0 million by the 2011 Census. The disparities in economic opportunities between and within states catalyse the migration of people from one place to another in search of employment (Deaton and Drèze (2002). Recent years saw a sharp increase in rural-urban migration, with young men travelling in large numbers to work in construction and urban services in the expanding informal sector (Srivastava and Bhattacharyya, 2003). Male migrates to work as semi-skilled and unskilled workers, primarily contractual labour in various service and informal sectors (Kar, 2019). They work in unsafe worksites in manufacturing activities ranging from construction and brick kilns to rural harvesting operations (ILO, 2017). In particular, the construction sector, notorious for its poor working conditions and low wages, is dominated by seasonal migrants (Datta, 2020). The recent Covid-19 pandemic has had a more significant impact on the lives of migrant labourers across the country, losing their jobs and incomes and becoming stranded in distressing conditions in destinations far away from their homes. The subsequent lockdown imposed by the central and various state governments to slow down the pandemic spread created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis for *internal* migrants, revealing the vast magnitude of invisible and vulnerable migrants in India's workforce across cities and states (Srivastava, 2020).

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Therefore, migrants' working and living conditions, especially at the destination, are always a serious concern because of losing the local support enjoyed in their native places. Solanki (2002) has observed that, for migrants, the tenure of work in industries like construction is unpredictable, leaving them insecure about income and employment. The pay, time, and working hours depend upon employers, who do not provide them anything more than minimum subsistence wages and unacceptable working conditions (Lall, Selod and Shalizi, 2006). Long and flexible working hours combined with low salaries characterise the seasonal migration in India (Singh and Iyer, 1985; Krishnaiah, 1997). Srivastava and Sutradhar (2016) found that migrant construction workers work in poor conditions in the National Capital Region, Delhi. Besides, workers in the informal sector are often thrown out of their jobs without being paid (Mukherjee et al., 2009). Moreover, the unequal wage rate between migrant and local labourers is a vital issue examined in many migration studies.

In migration studies, the living conditions of migrant workers have also been examined. Srivastava and Sutradhar (2016) observed that the migrant construction workers in the National Capital Region, Delhi are impoverished and live mainly in the slums. In a study, Naraparaju (2014) found that about 75.0 per cent of migrants in Navi Mumbai reside in kutcha and semi-pucca houses. The living conditions of the migrants in Bangalore city were deplorable as most migrant workers stay in small sheds, either on the construction sites/basement or on neighbouring vacant sites or the roadside (Premchander et al., 2014). The migrants' susceptibility, defined as a state of being exposed to vulnerability or danger or abuse (Chaterjee, 2006), is another pertinent issue examined in migration studies. A combination of factors at the place of destination complicates the vulnerability, premised on the alien status of the migrants (Borhade, 2011).

The rationale of the study:

According to the latest census data (2011), India has recorded 37.6 per cent of its total population, i.e. 455 million people as migrants, nearly seven percentage points more than the previous census year (2001). Of this total, almost 68.0 per cent constitute female migrants, mostly moving after the marriage and nearly 24.0 per cent of the male migrants, moving for work or employment, both within and beyond state boundaries.

In India, regional inequalities in employment opportunities among states result in large-scale interstate migration (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). Interstate migration in India constituted 12.0 per cent of total migration, meaning thereby 54.0 million people crossing state boundaries. Of these, 23 million are male migrants, one-half moving for work/employment. The migration for economic reasons has increased over time and appears to drive the internal migration of men (Nayyar and Kim, 2018). A few well-established long-distance interstate migration streams have been prominent in India, and the various macro and micro studies have highlighted this. Recent studies focusing on Bihar suggest that the out-migration rate has doubled since the 1970s, indicating that migration is now mainly to urban areas as work availability has declined in traditional destinations in irrigated commercial agricultural parts of Punjab (Karan, 2003). Labour migration from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Maharashtra is another significant inter-state migration stream in India (see Mukherjee et, 2009; Chandrasekhar and Sharma, 2014; Thorat and Jones, 2013).

Migration to Delhi from far distance states like West Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand is a typical migration stream (Mukherjee, 2001). Gujarat is one of the favourite destinations for interstate migrants, especially its linkage with the Orissa (now Odisha) state (Bhagat et al., 2020; Sahu and Das, 2008).

But labour migration to Kerala from distant states like West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Manipur is a recent phenomenon (Kumar, 2011). Narayana et al. (2013) report that Kerala has a migrant labour population of 2.5 million, projected to rise to 4.8 million in the next ten years. West Bengal holds the largest share of about 20.0 per cent of the total migrant labour force. Since the late nineteenth century, West Bengal, a migrant destination state (Ghosh, 2013), has become a source of male out-migration, especially from its economically and agriculturally depressed areas. Low wages (Reja and Das, 2019), lack of job opportunities (Debnath and Nayak, 2018), underemployment (Dutta, 2019), or debt push migrants from rural West Bengal to other states. The recent West Bengal -Kerala migration stream is one example of this.

In Kerala, the construction sector is booming, attracting construction labour from several states of India. West Bengal contributes the most significant chunk to this labour stream. In Kerala, the phenomenal growth of the construction sector and the state's large remittance flows, mainly from Gulf countries and the progress of IT-related services in urban centres are interlinked (Shameer and Kasim, 2017).

The Bengali migrants come in large numbers to Kerala for construction work, and their socio-economic and cultural milieu significantly differ from that of Kerala. Also, the distance traversed by these migrants is nearly 2,500 km. They face different kinds of adversities and challenges in the new environment. A few and far studies focus on all such issues and problems faced by the construction workers coming to Kerala from rural West Bengal. Hence, there is a need to examine.

Objectives of the Study

In the light of the above statements, the present study examines the social-wellbeing of the migrant labourers from West Bengal after they move to a socially, culturally and linguistically different environment after coming to Kerala state (Kumar, 2011). The vital issue to explore here is how vulnerable these Bengali migrants are in the new milieu? In addition, the effort is to understand to what extent various legal laws enacted by the Government of India successfully safeguard the interest of the Bengali migrant construction workers in Kerala.

Database and Methodology

Based on a primary survey from April to July 2013 in Ernakulam district (Kerala), the study has a sample size of 300 migrant construction workers from West Bengal working in Kerala for a minimum of six months. The survey used purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The author used a structured and pre-coded questionnaire schedule to interview the thirty migrant workers engaged in construction activities to assess their living conditions. In addition, the researcher held two focus group discussions with the migrant construction workers as part of the

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study. The author used simple statistical techniques such as mean, median, and standard deviation for data analysis.

The fieldwork was conducted nearly a decade before, in 2013, yet the ground realities have not changed much in the last eight to nine years. Hence, the author believes that the study findings emerging from the present data analysis must be relevant.

Bengali Migrant Workers: Working Conditions

The majority of the 300 sampled Bengali migrant workers in Kerala worked as construction helpers, with nearly 46.0 per cent as masons and the remaining as masons-cum-contractors (Table1). Thus, most Bengali construction workers in Kerala are unskilled labourers. Further, about three-fourths of them were engaged in privately-owned housing construction, indicating the importance of gulf remittances in the housing sector of Kerala state (Azeez and Begum, 2009). Of them, more than one-fourth were involved in the construction of offices, schools, theatres, factories, hospitals etc. Only one per cent of respondents were engaged in making roads, tunnels, bridges, dams, canals etc.

Table 1: Migrant construction classification by different characteristics		
Occupation type	Workers No.	Per cent
Mason	137	45.7
Construction helper	156	52.0
Masons-cum-contractors	7	2.3
Nature of Work		
Building private houses	217	72.3
Building offices, cinemas, factories, hospitals, schools etc.	79	26.3
Constructing roads, tunnels, bridges, dams, canals etc.	4	1.4
Number of working days/month		
< 20 days	36	12.0
21-25 days	81	27.0
25-30 days	183	61.0
Nature of work supervision		
Self	34	11.3
Contractor	231	77.0
Big companies	23	7.7
Self/Contractor	12	4.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

Similarly, more than three-fourths of such workers were working under contractors. Such a finding conforms with earlier observations of the Gulati Institution of Finances and Taxation (2013), stating that 'having reached Kerala bulk of interstate migrants (66.0 per cent) work under contractors'. Though large numbers of the migrants worked under contractors, they were hardly ever recruited by contractors. Instead, the migrants entered the labour market with the help of their friends, relatives or fellow villagers (Reja and Das, 2019). More than one in ten Bengali migrant workers in Kerala work independently (Table 1).

These migrant workers assemble at a particular place in a market area in the early morning and wait to get picked up for work. Migrants were picked up by both the contractors and the local people. Sometimes, suppose the contractor or the local people hired a particular migrant on a specific day and was happy with his work. In that case, that migrant worker will continue working on the same site/house till the end of construction work. Interestingly, the respondents among migrant workers told the present author that they do not like to work with a contractor, although working under a contractor means more working days regularly. They get far better daily wages from direct contacts than from a contractor. Therefore, several migrant construction workers from West Bengal initially working under a contractor start working through independent connections at the earliest opportunity. However, about 8.0 per cent of respondent workers reported that they worked under big companies and enjoyed the benefits of free accommodation and a regular job but below the wage market rates.

Further, the migrants' monthly income is the outcome of the daily wage rate and the working days in a month. Sixty-one per cent of the total migrants reported 25-30 working days, 27.0 per cent 21-25 working days, and 12.0 per cent less than 20 working days in a month. The mean working days were the highest (27 days) for the migrant workers working under the banner of big companies and contractors and the lowest (24 days) for working on the individual level. As expected, wage rate differentials were the maximum for self-operating migrant labourers and the minimum for those working under the banners of the big companies. Surprisingly, wage rate differentials were also relatively high in the case of migrant workers working under contractors.

Wages: Rates and Frequency of Payment

More than two-thirds (67.0 per cent) of the migrants reported monthly wages received ranged between Rs 400 and 599, and only less than one-third (28.3 per cent) received Rs 600 or more. A small share of less than 5.0 per cent received wages below Rs 400/day (Table 2). The mean daily income of the Bengali migrant construction workers in Kerala is Rs. 516.32, with a standard deviation of 85.22. This wage rate reflects that the Kerala state offers the highest wages for migrant workers in the unorganised sector (Peter et al., 2020; Zachariah and Rajan, 2012). Thus the Bengali migrant construction workers in Kerala are better paid than prevailing rates at their native place or workplace in other parts of India (Reja and Das, 2019).

However, wage rates differ widely between migrant and local workers in construction activities in Kerala. The Bengali migrant workers reported that notwithstanding the similar nature of work, a Malayalee worker is paid an amount of Rs 100-200 more than their counterpart from West Bengal. In a study, Baiju and Shamna (2019) also observed the wage gap between in-migrant and local labourers in the construction sector of Kerala. The failure of migrants to integrate with the local community is the significant reason for their exploitation and discrimination at the hands of employers and contractors (Moses and Rajan, 2012).

However, the migrant construction workers appreciated the wage payment timings. The majority of migrant workers (58.0 per cent) stated that they received their wages at the end of the day. In their own words, *'the best thing in Kerala was that we got wages instantly after cleaning*

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the hand (after finishing the day's work).' Only the ten of 300 respondents, making 3.0 per cent of the total, stated that they get their wages every month, while none reporting delayed or nonpayment of wages.

Wage rate/day (in Rs)	Number of respondents	Per cent
below 400	14	4.7
400-499	101	33.7
500-599	100	33.3
600 and above	85	28.3
Frequency of Payment		
Daily	175	58.33
Weekly	115	38.33
Monthly	10	3.33

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

Living and Work Place: Travel mode and distance

Another critical issue is the distance between the place of living and working. Migrants' workplace frequently changes with the employer's shifts to new work sites. The functional area also gets altered when the migrants change their contractors or employers. Sometimes the migrants also change their living places, changing the distance between the working and living places. Of course, the mode of transport, cost of travel and the journey time are the factors involved.

Distance travel (in Km)	No.	Per cent	Distance travel (in Km)	No.	Per cent
< 2.0	76	27.0	15.0 – 20.0	7	2.5
2.0 – 5.0	33	11.7	> 20.0 km	10	3.5
5.0 – 10.0	92	32.6	Total	282	100.0
10.0 – 15.0	64	22.7			
Travel Mode					
Walking	73	25.9	Bus	169	59.9
Bicycle	15	05.3	Company/contractor own car	25	08.9
Is travel cost charged?					
Yes	169	59.9	No	113	40.1
If charged, borne by					
Self	91	53.8	Contractor/Company	38	22.5
Shared (self and contractor)	40	23.7	Total	169	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

Except for eighteen respondent migrant workers, all lived in rented accommodations away from their work sites. Of the 282 migrants living in rented accommodation, about two-

fifths (38.0 per cent) lived within a radius of 5 km of their worksites (Table 3). More than half of the sample migrants, i.e. 56 per cent, reported that the distance between their living place and the work area was between 5km and 15 km. Another 5.0 per cent of the sample migrants said they had to travel a distance of more than 15 km to reach their present workplace.

Sixty per cent of the migrants used public buses to get to the work area. Another one-fourth of the migrants mentioned that they used to go to work by walking, whereas about 6.0 per cent of migrants said they used bicycles to go to the working site. The rest of the migrants used to go to the worksite by carriages provided by respective companies or contractors.

Further, 40.0 per cent of migrants did not have to bear any transportation costs since they will to reach the worksite either on foot or by bicycle or by the company-provided vehicles. However, half the migrants mentioned that they had to pay their transportation costs themselves. In contrast, nearly one-fourth of the respondents stated that they and the contractors equally share the transport cost.

Living Conditions of Migrant Construction Workers

The Living condition of the migrants, especially at their destination, are significant and pertinent issues in migration studies. More than 85.0 per cent of the sampled migrants lived in rented accommodations. Another eight per cent lived in the houses provided by the company, and the remaining six per cent lived at the construction site. Most rented rooms are semi-pucca houses of brick walls, cemented floors, tiles, or tin roofing. Two-thirds of migrants lived in these semi-pucca houses, one-story buildings with 4-5 rooms. These rooms are overcrowded. One-third of the total migrants lived in pucca dwellings with two or three-story apartments with many rooms. The owners rent the entire building to the migrants by the building owners. Room rent is slightly higher than the semi pucca rooms. These findings are in sharp contrast to many migration studies that highlighted the deplorable living conditions of the migrant construction workers at their place of destination.

More than half (53.0 per cent) of the respondents shared a room with six to ten persons, one-fourth with one to fifth people and the remaining more than one-fifth with more than ten persons (see Table 4). Thus, the average number of construction workers sharing a room was about nine, a very high room density. GIFT (2013), in a study entitled 'Domestic Migrant Labour in Kerala, reported that "In one of the one-room houses, there were 12 occupants.....all of them slept on the floor". Sharing rooms with others is economical as it helps them minimise their room rent and save money for the home. Most often, the migrants sharing rooms come from the same locality/village in their home state. In 2019, the Kerala Government launched the *Apna Ghar* migrant housing project under the Interstate Migrant Workers' Welfare Scheme (ISMWWS-2010) to provide affordable housing on rent to migrant workers. Such dormitory-style rooms are equipped with cooking, dining and toilets facilities. As most of the migrant workers in Kerala are not registered (Peter et al., 2020), these migrant workers cannot get substantial benefits from this scheme.

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Forty-four per cent of the total 257 migrants paying room rent paid an amount between Rs. 400-499, another 41.0 per cent Rs. 500-599 per head per month (Table 4) and the remaining 14.0 per cent between 300-399. The average amount paid as room rent per worker per month is Rs. 468.60 per head per month; most migrant workers paid room rates higher than the average rent.

Arrangement type	No.	Per cent	Arrangement type	No.	Per cent
Rented	257	85.7	Construction site	18	6.0
Company provided houses	25	8.3	Total	300	100.0
Building Materials					
Pucca	97	34.4	Semi-pucca	185	65.6
Persons living per room					
1 -5	70	24.8	11 -15	33	11.7
6 -10	150	53.2	> 15	29	10.3
Room rent/migrant (in Rs)					
300-399	22	8.6	500-599	106	41.2
400-499	112	43.6	600 and above	17	6.6
Source of Fuel					
Kerosene	38	12.7	Diesel	213	71.0
Fuelwood	49	16.3			

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

All the sampled migrants reported having toilets within living premises. The survey, however, revealed that the number of bathrooms is less than the number of occupants. In many cases, there was hardly one or two toilets catering to the need of 20- 25 people. Few people had also complained about the water availability, but not a problem for the majority. The chief source of water is the well. In Kerala, almost all household has a well, and the water is pumped through a submersible pump. The migrants used this water for domestic purposes, including cooking and drinking. The wells are covered with mosquito nets to prevent the fall of leaves from the trees or other things into the well, and chemicals are applied to maintain the wells' water quality.

Most Bengali migrants prepared food in a group. They usually got up early in the morning and started cooking to finish around 7.00 am to finish eating before leaving for work. They also carried the same cooked food for lunch with them. One migrant said that '*Malik*' (contractors or employers) distribute tiffin around 10-11 am. They usually cook rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner as per their eating habits. Everyone in the group took part in preparing food by turn. For cooking, a portion of the rooms or verandas were temporary kitchens. By and large, migrants used kerosene stoves for cooking. More than 70.0 per cent of the sampled migrants had reported using diesel as cooking fuel. About 13 per cent of migrants used kerosene as a cooking fuel (Table 4). Though diesel was costlier than kerosene at the open market, the easy availability of diesel from pumps encouraged them to use diesel as the principal cooking fuel. About 16.0 per cent of the sampled migrants used fuelwood for cooking purposes.

Migrants' Communication with their Family Members

The frequency of communication indicates the degree of migrants' attachment to their family members. Therefore, this study tries to determine the nature of the Bengali migrants' link with their family members. For this, the migrants were asked about the frequency of their communication back home with family members, frequency of home visits, and stay duration at the native place from the workplace in Kerala.

Most of the respondents talk on the phone with their families daily. In contrast, a few do the same with a gap of more than a week (Table 5). The migrants, not having their mobile phones, used friends/relatives/fellow villagers' mobiles and paid the charges for that call. In many cases, migrants bought only a SIM card, recharged it, inserted the SIM card into others' mobiles, and then talked with their family members.

About 70 per cent of the sampled migrants said they visited their home once every 3-6 months (Table 5). Another one-fifth of the sample migrants reported visiting home once in more than six months. Considering the distance to be travelled and the cost involved in this long journey to see the native place, the frequency of migrants' home visits is relatively high. It may be because Bengali migrant construction workers leave their families in their native locales (Reja and Das, 2019).

Seventy-one per cent of migrants said that they usually stayed at their native place for only 1-2 months, and another 10.0 per cent mentioned that their waiting period was about 2-3 months (Table 5). On the other hand, about 16.0 per cent of migrants reported a very short stay at home, i.e. less than one month. Thus, the Bengali migrants take a small break and return quickly to their workplace in Kerala. Among the sampled migrants, only 3.0 per cent reported a little longer staying period at home, i.e. about more than three months. Therefore, this migration stream is more of circular migration in nature, working in multiple destinations during their lifetime and returning to their native places (Deshingkar and Anderson, 2004).

Table 5: Communication of migrant construction workers with their family members					
Communication frequency	Number	Per cent	Communication frequency	Number	Per cent
Daily	177	59.0	Once a week	49	16.3
2-4 days a week	65	21.7	In more than a week	9	3.0
Frequency to go home					
Once in 3 months/less	28	9.93	Once in 3-6 months	197	69.86
> Six months	57	20.21			
Stay months in native places					
One month or below	45	16.0	> Three months	7	2.5
1-2 months	201	71.3	Total	282	100.0
2-3 months	29	10.3			

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

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Bengali Migrant Workers in Kerala: Language and Health vulnerability

In a vast and highly diverse country like India, intra- and inter-state migration transpose workers into unfamiliar cultural and social settings because of India's physical and socio-cultural diversities (Mahadevia, 2002). In the case of migrants, According to Chatterjee (2006), migrant workers' vulnerability is justified due to differences in culture, language and people between their origin and destination places. In the present case, West Bengal and Kerala, migrants' origin and destination states, markedly differ socially, culturally, and linguistically (Kumar, 2011). For instance, the mother tongue of the migrants' is 'Bengali', an Indo-Aryan family language. In contrast, the mother tongue of Kerala's people is Malayalam, a Dravidian family language. The rural background of Bengali migrants makes things still challenging. They can speak either Bengali or broken Hindi. To better understand the intricacy of the language problem, the author asked the migrants about the difficulty they face in communicating with local people. More than two-thirds of the sampled migrants levelled the language problem as 'very much in dealing with local peoples. Another one-fourth of migrants termed language problems as 'medium'. Only 21 persons thought that language 'was not so much a problem in communication with the local people as they understand the Malayalam language well. Moses and Rajan (2012) also observed that the lack of local language prevents the migrant labour from adequately communicating with the local population. For example, one of the migrant workers shared with this author that on some occasions, the local people who came to hire labour on labour hiring sites did not hire his services because he failed to communicate appropriately in the local Malayalee language. In obtaining access to health facilities in private and public health centres, the language barrier has emerged as the biggest problem for migrants as they cannot express their problems to the doctors.

The poor living conditions, including overcrowding, malnutrition, poor housing conditions, hazardous occupational conditions, low accessibility to health care services, and a low level of awareness, increase the health vulnerability of migrant workers (Borhade, 2011). The Bengali migrant construction workers live in overcrowded rooms and sometimes unhygienic environmental conditions. Thus they are exposed to many health hazards and, more specifically, increase the chance of being prone to infectious diseases. Also, they lacked access to Kerala's public health system. First of all, poor language skill prevents them from going to public health care centres. In the words of one migrant, "*In a public hospital, to communicate with a doctor about the problems was very difficult.*" Secondly, the timings of the government hospital are inconvenient for the migrants. If the migrants have to consult a doctor in a government hospital, they have to forgo a day's work that they generally do not want to do to maximise their earnings. Thirdly, they stated that they seldom got free medicines from public hospitals. These factors collectively discourage the migrants from visiting public health centres or hospitals. Only five per cent of the migrants visit any government dispensary/hospital for treatment. About 30.0 per cent of the migrants preferred to go to private hospitals/clinics (Table 6). According to Kumar (2011), interstate migrants in Kerala depend more on private clinics and hospitals than public hospitals. Almost two-thirds of the migrants brought medicine from medical shops without consulting doctors. Thus, the prevalence of self-medication, which positively impacts individual health and the health care system (Bertoldi et al., 2014), was found among the migrants. The

factors promoting self-medication were operative mainly due to the mild nature of the illness. More than two-thirds of sampled migrants reported fever, headache and cold and cough coupled with a long time spent in queues for doctor's visits and the language barrier support such practice.

The migrants need comprehensive health coverage as they primarily work in the unorganised sector and are vulnerable. The Government of India launched *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana* (RSBY) in 2008, a health insurance scheme for unorganised sector workers belonging to the BPL category and their family members. However, during the survey, it was observed that no one was aware of such a health scheme. The Kerala Government also launched *the Aawaz Insurance Scheme* in 2016, an insurance package designed exclusively for migrant workers which offer health insurance cover of ₹15,000 and an accidental insurance cover of rupees two lakhs. Nevertheless, the majority of the migrant workers in the state are unaware of its existence (Sreekumar 2019).

Table 6: Distribution of medical health care services, migrant construction workers' visits for treatment by management type

Place of Treatment	Number	Per cent
Private hospital	36	12.68
Government hospital	15	5.28
Private clinic	49	17.25
Medical shop	184	64.79
Total	284	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

State labour laws protect all labourers, including migrants. Some such legal protections and policies included the Minimum Wages Act, 1948; the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970; the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions Service) Act, 1996 and so on. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1979) Act, enacted in 1976, deals with malpractices associated with recruiting and employing workers who migrate across state boundaries. The Act only covers interstate migrants recruited through contractors or intermediaries and those establishments that employ five or more such workers on any given day. In addition to (ISMW) Act, Kerala launched an Interstate Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme (ISMWWS-2010) in 2010, which has several provisions for the welfare of the migrant workers. The main concerns are safeguarding migrants' right to non-discriminatory wages, travel and displacement and journey allowances, and suitable working conditions.

Though Kerala was the first Indian state to enact a social security scheme for migrant workers (Srivastava, 2020), it has to put much effort into ensuring the legal rights of the migrants. The study found wage differences between Bengali migrants and local labours for the same work, which violated the provision of equal wage under labour laws. In addition, the study also found that the migrants were unaware of displacement allowances or journey allowances under any legal act. However, in this regard, some migrants said that sometimes contractors give money for their journey to their native place. But that amount was neither fixed nor governed by

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any Govt. acts, and it was a goodwill gesture. The amount depended on the whim of the contractors.

Conclusions

The Kerala labour market offers a high wage rate and plenty of job opportunities, primarily blue-collar jobs- working as a significant pull factor for the Bengali migrants. Besides, the majority of the migrants were also satisfied with the state's prevailing timely wage payment system.

The majority of the migrants live in rented pucca and semi-pucca type accommodations in place living on construction sites. This finding contrasts with the conclusion of many other micro-studies conducted earlier in India. However, overcrowding was the salient feature of such rented accommodations. A majority of the migrant workers, who worked initially as contract labourers, got regular work later.

The Bengali migrant construction workers are vulnerable on many grounds. They faced severe language problems, preventing them from accessing health care and protecting their rights, making them more vulnerable. Lack of local language skills prevents them from understanding their labour rights, like the right to equality, the freedom to secure work, security schemes, etc. They also cannot take advantage of Kerala's acclaimed public health system and the different health schemes of central and state governments, including the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) Aawaz Insurance Scheme, etc.

The state government must help the migrant labourers to register under different health schemes and work for information dissemination in the mother tongue of the migrant workers at specific locations for their benefit. After all, Migrant workers are necessary to carry out low-end jobs not performed by the local workers.

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