

An Exploratory Study on Pattern and Factors Influencing Out Migration among COVID-19 Returned Migrants in North Bihar

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ABSTRACT: COVID-19 induced lockdown caused the widespread movement of migrants across the globe. In India the lockdown started from 25th March 2020 and lasted after 68 days on 31st May 2020 with partial and no movement. Around 15 lakh registered migrant workers returned to Bihar keeping in view of this fact the present study was conducted in four prominent districts of northern region of Bihar state. These districts were Madhubani, Darbhanga, Samastipur and Sitamarhi. In view of area for study, five blocks from each four districts (Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur and Sitamarhi) were again purposely selected. Data collection was a challenging task from researchers' end, since respondents had faced a lot of hardship during COVID-19 and they often burst into tears, recalling the severity faced by them while returning home. From each block 15 returned migrant workers were selected thus from each district 75 respondents were selected. Hence the total sample size of the study was 300. The results indicate that majority of migrant workers were from young age group, male, married and belongs to extremely backward caste. Majority of returned migrant workers were functionally literate and having medium level of working experience. The mean value of working experience was 6.8 years. These migrant workers were engaged in agricultural activities before migrating. However majority of migrant workers were having low level of agricultural experience additionally almost one third of them were having low level of experience in allied activities. The primary occupation of more than half of the migrant workers was unskilled labours. The mean value of family income before COVID was ₹ 216058.40 but after COVID it was reduced to ₹ 191989.77. Further, the mean value of self income before COVID-19 pandemic was ₹ 142860 and it was decreased by 12.05 percent. The debt status of migrant workers was increased by 15.32 percent after COVID. Majority of migrant workers were having low level of material possession, extension contact and medium level of mass media exposure. More than half (55.67%) of these migrant workers were seasonal migrants, seeking employment was the key reason for migration for migration. The most favourite destination for migration was Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana etc. The nature of work ranges from agricultural or casual labourers, construction workers, painter, plumber, labour in brick kiln, maid, factory workers, self employed, skilled workers etc. **Keywords:** COVID-19, Migrants, Socio-economic, Migration pattern.

Keywords: COVID-19, Migrants, Migration Pattern, North Bihar, Returned Migrants

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 induced lockdown caused the widespread movement of migrants across the globe. In India the lockdown started from 25th March 2020 and lasted after 68 days on 31st May 2020 with partial and no

movement. The most vulnerable are informal workers, who are the least protected among all workers (ILO, 2020). A blog published by the International Monetary Fund on 14 April referred to this phenomenon as the 'Great Lockdown', a period of economic collapse characterized by quarantine and social distancing

practices, which resulted in the collapse of all economic activities worldwide Gopinath (2020). Especially those workers whose livelihoods and economic activities were disrupted by the lockdown, who had migrated to different parts of the country seeking a better life, suffered a severe setback. All of a sudden, there was a complete closure of the company, including their livelihood. This caused a great deal of suffering for these workers. As of now, India has an estimated 47-crore workforce (Surya, 2020). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these employees are not entitled to any compensation or benefits. With low wages and little in the bank as savings, their situation is pathetic. More than 125 million Indians are affected by the shutdown, including the poorest. Due to the lack of work and money, these migrant labourers were unable to support their families. As migrant workers, they have no savings and survive on a very small budget. Their weekly earnings are remitted to their families at home. For them, the ill-planned lockdown struck out of the blue. This group of labourers was immediately hit by the lockdown crisis as they lost their jobs, as reported by the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE). In April, 91.3 million of them lost their jobs. By April 2020, 27.7% of Indians above the age of 15 were employed. There were 122 million additional unemployed Indians in April, increasing the unemployment rate from 8.7% in March to 23.5%. As of early May, it has risen to 27.1%. There is a partial or complete lockdown in effect worldwide as a result of preventive measures taken to curb the spread of the pandemic. 81 percent of all workers worldwide have been affected by partial or complete lockdowns. The sudden shutdown of businesses and industries forced thousands of migrants, mostly precariously employed workers, and their dependents to travel back home under the most inhospitable conditions. There was untold hardship, tragedy, and even death as a result of this (Rajan and Heller 2020). Several migrants felt that they had no choice but to set out on any means of transportation that they could find. At least 200 migrants were estimated to have died on the road while attempting to return home because they had no choice other than to travel by foot (Banerji, 2020). The majority of Indian farmers are small landowners. Due to decreasing productivity, water scarcity and other factors, the agriculture sector has been facing a crisis for the past two decades. In the past, most of the returnees were marginal farmers. Government sources do not provide an exact number of returnees, regardless of whether they returned by their own vehicle, by bicycle, or on foot. Data cited by the Lok Sabha on 14 September 2020 indicates that 10.5 million individuals use government-arranged transport, including buses and

Shramik trains. The two poorest and most populous states, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, received the largest number of migrants. Total number of registered migrants returned to Bihar was around 14,67,056 whereas expected number of return migrants to the state was about 24,56,800 (Kumar *et al.*, 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Exploratory research was followed (Shukla *et al.*, 2022) in four prominent districts of northern region of Bihar state. These districts were Madhubani, Darbhanga, Samastipur and Sitamarhi. These districts are prone to net out-migration. Out of the total 14.67 lakh registered return migrant workers to Bihar, 2.18 lakh belong to these four districts. In view of area for study, five blocks from each four districts (Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur and Sitamarhi) were again purposely selected on the basis of informal talks with local people and assumption that these blocks have highest share in number of return migrants during COVID-19 pandemic. From Darbhanga district Bahadurpur, Keoti, Baheri, Benipur and Kusheshwarasthan were selected for the study. While from Madhubani district Rahika, Pandaul, Kaluahi, Jhanjharpur and Bisfi blocks were selected. In Samastipur district Samastipur, Kalyanpur, Pusa, Tajpur and Sarairanjan were specifically selected, whereas from Sitamarhi district Dumra, Pupri, Riga, Bathnaha and Runnisaidpur was selected for data collection. Analysis of data that has already been acquired by others is referred to as secondary data analysis (Srivastava and Lal 2021). For the purpose of primary data collection a list was prepared from different government sources and snowball sampling method was applied. From each block 15 returned migrant workers were selected thus from each district 75 respondents were selected. Hence, the total sample size of the study was 300. For categorization of data Cumulative Square Root Frequency (CSRF) method was applied and further suitable statistical methods like frequency, percentage, mean, Garrett ranking technique were use to draw the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1, it is clear that about one third (62.00%) of the migrant workers belong to young age group *i.e.* 29 year of age. From the above result and mean score it can be concluded that people of young age group have high tendency to migrate. Majority of respondents (95.67%) in the study area were male. More than half (61.67%) of the respondents were married. Exactly half (50.00%) of the respondents comes from extremely backward caste and about one fourth (24.67%) migrant workers were belonging to schedule caste.

Table 1: Socio-economic and Communicational characteristics of the migrant workers.

Sr. No.	Variables	Total - 300		Mean
		f	%	
1.	Age			
	Young (< 29 Years)	186	62.00	
	Middle (30 – 49 years)	109	36.33	28.62
	Old (>50 years)	05	1.66	
2.	Gender			
	Male	287	95.67	
	Female	13	4.33	
3.	Marital Status			
	Married	185	61.67	
	Unmarried	115	38.33	
4.	Caste			
	Unreserved (General)	15	5.00	
	Backward Class	58	19.33	
	Extremely Backward Caste	150	50.00	
	Schedule Caste	74	24.67	
	Schedule Tribes	3	1.00	
5.	Education Level			
	Illiterate	3	1.00	
	Functionally literate	131	43.67	
	Primary	68	22.66	
	Middle	59	19.67	
	Secondary	32	10.67	
	Higher secondary	5	1.66	
	College education	2	0.67	
6.	Working experience			
	Low (< 4.57 years)	113	37.67	
	Medium (4.58 – 10.18 years)	125	41.67	6.8 years
	High (>10.18 years)	62	20.66	
7.	Experience in agriculture/allied activity			
	(a) Agricultural Experience			
	Low (< 5.37 years)	156	52.00	
	Medium (5.38 – 12.49 years)	103	34.33	6.87 years
	High (>12.49 years)	41	13.67	
	Experience in Crops			
	Cereals Only	55	18.34	
	Cereals + Pulses	72	24.00	
	Cereals + Pulses + Tobacco	36	12.00	
	Cereals + Pulses + Vegetables	69	23.00	
	Cereals + Pulses + Sugarcane	25	8.33	
	Cereals + Pulses + Oilseeds	39	13.00	
	Others	4	1.33	
(b)	Experience in Allied Activities			
	Low (< 7.53 years)	154	64.71	
	Medium (7.54 – 11.55 years)	40	16.81	5.89 years
	High (> 11.55 years)	44	18.48	
	Allied Area			
	Milk Only	43	18.07	
	Meat Only	88	36.98	
	Milk + Meat	50	21.00	
	Milk + Mushroom	22	9.25	
	Meat + Mushroom	17	7.14	
	Milk + Beekeeping	12	5.04	
	Others	6	2.52	
8.	Occupation			
	Primary Occupation			
	Unskilled Labours	161	53.67	
	Semi Skilled Labours	39	13.00	
	Skilled Labours	78	26.00	
	Highly Skilled Labours	2	0.66	
	Others	20	6.67	
	Subsidiary Occupation			
	Only Agriculture	62	20.67	
	Agriculture with Animal Husbandry	238	79.33	
9.	Family Income (Pre-COVID)			

	Low (196596₹ /=-)	134	44.67	
	Medium (196597 –242279₹ /=-)	108	36.00	₹216058.40
	High (> 242279₹ /=-)	58	19.33	
	Family Income (Post-COVID)			
	Low (₹175861 /=-)	156	52.00	
	Medium (175862 – ₹217776 /=-)	86	28.66	₹191989.77
	High (> 217776₹ /=-)	58	19.33	
10.	Self Income (Pre-COVID)			
	Low (₹132575)	69	23.00	
	Medium (132576 – ₹159225 /=-)	173	57.67	₹142860
	High (>159225₹ /=-)	58	19.33	
	Self Income (Post-COVID)			
	Below (130613₹ /=-)	156	52.00	
	Medium (130614 –158647₹ /=-)	86	28.66	₹125645.4
	High (>158647₹ /=-)	58	19.33	
11.	Debt (Pre-COVID)			
	Low (29521₹ /=-)	175	58.33	
	Medium (29522 –132720₹ /=-)	68	22.67	₹54150
	High (>132720₹ /=-)	57	19.00	
	Debt (Post-COVID)			
	Low (41509₹ /=-)	165	55.00	
	Medium (41510 –103671₹ /=-)	79	26.33	₹62446. 67
	High (> 103671₹ /=-)	56	18.67	
12.	Land holding			
	Marginal (< 2.5 acre)	300	100	0.15 acre
	Land holding on lease			
	Marginal (< 2.5 acre)	300	100.00	2.05 acre
13.	Categories	Indigenous Breed (N)	Cross Breed (N)	Buffalo (N)
	Milking	71	54	59
	Pregnant	8	14	10
	Dry	45	34	19
	Male<2	10	13	7
	Female<2	43	40	46
	Heifer	17	23	12
	Drought	24	0	0
14.	Material Possession			
	Low (10)	164	54.67	
	Medium (10.01 – 15.80)	79	26.33	
	High (>15.80)	57	19.00	
15.	Mass Media Exposure			
	Low (10.28)	121	40.33	
	Medium (10.29 – 16.18)	125	41.67	13.06
	High (>16.18)	54	18.00	
16.	Extension Contact			
	Low (17.68)	123	41.00	
	Medium (17.69 – 26.47)	119	39.67	20.60
	High (> 27.47)	58	19.33	

The basic education possessed by majority (43.67%) of the respondents were functionally literate level followed by 22.64% respondents were having primary level of education. Around 41.67% respondents were having medium (4.58-10.18 years) level of experience. The mean working experience of respondents was 6.8 years. More than half (52.00%) of the migrant workers were having low (5.37 years) agricultural experience. Majority of migrant workers were found to be growing cereals + pulses and cereals + pulses + vegetables (23.00%). With respect to allied activities almost more than one third (64.17%) of migrant workers were again having low (7.53 years) level of experience in allied activities. Moreover, the area in which majority of migrant workers were having allied experience was meat (goat, hen rearing) and meat along with milk. The primary occupation of majority (53.67%) of migrant

workers was unskilled laborers followed by skilled laborers who were 26.00 percent of the migrant workers. The subsidiary occupation of a huge 79.33 percent of migrant workers was agriculture with animal husbandry. The family income of majority (44.67%) of migrant workers pre COVID was low (196596₹ /=-) and the family income of most of the migrant workers post COVID was again low *i.e.* ₹175861₹ /=-. The mean value of family income display that the annual family income of migrant workers have been reduced by 11.14 percent after COVID. With regard to self income of migrant workers majority of them were having medium (57.67%) level of self income pre COVID. Whereas, post COVID self income of majority of migrant workers were found to be low (130613₹ /=-). From the mean value of self income it is evident that annual self income of migrant workers was

decreased by 12.05 percent. Debt level of migrant workers pre COVID were low (₹ 29521 ₹ / =) to majority (58.33%) of migrant workers while post COVID majority (55.00%) of migrant workers have low (₹ 41509 ₹ / =) level of debt status. All cent percent of the migrant workers were possessing marginal (< 2.5 acre) of land holding and the mean value of land holding was 0.15 acre. Majority of migrant workers were having land holding on lease to perform agricultural operation and the mean value of land holding on lease was 2.05 acre. Rearing livestock was an important occupational aspect of migrant workers family. In terms of milking animal indigenous cattle breed were having maximum number followed by buffalo and cross breed. Among pregnant animals cross breed possess the maximum number followed by

buffalo and indigenous breed. In between dry animals indigenous breed were again having maximum numbers. More than half (54.67%) of the migrant workers were having medium (10.29-16.18) level of material possession. About 41.00 percent migrant workers were having low (₹ 17.68) level of extension contact.

Insights into different aspect of migration of COVID-19 returned migrants. From Table 2 it can be observed that most of the family (43.34%) in study area were having 1 members migrated followed by 23.33% those families where only male members were migrated.

More than half (55.67%) of these migrated members were mostly seasonal migrants followed by those 32.67 percent who were short term migrants.

Table 2: Migration type and pattern of migration among COVID-19 returned migrants.

Sr. No.	Migration type in respondent's family	f	%
1.	One member	133	43.34
2.	Only male members	97	32.33
3.	Male and female migration	70	23.33
	Pattern of Migration	f	%
1.	Seasonal migration (< 1 year)	167	55.67
2.	Short term migration (1 – 10 year)	98	32.67
3.	Long term migration (> 10 years)	35	11.66

Table 3: Reasons and factors influencing for out migration.

Sr. No.	Reasons for migration	f	%
1.	Seeking Employment	143	47.67
2.	Seeking Employment and for debt repayment	65	21.67
3.	Seeking Employment and Marriage	51	17.00
4.	Seeking Employment along with children's Education	41	13.66
	Factors Influencing Out Migration	Mean	Rank
1.	Searching for Livelihood	71.25	1 st
2.	Income disparity	55.15	2 nd
3.	Scarcity of resources	51.50	3 rd
4.	Marriage	36.30	4 th
5.	Relatives or Friends	34.80	5 th

Table 3 divulges that the predominant reason for migration among majority (47.67%) of the respondents in this study was seeking employment. Shukla and Lal (2022) investigated Agriculture women's workers as share of all workers (%) and revealed that Bihar (20.82%) ranked 10th from the bottom in terms of Agriculture women's workers as share of all workers. So, if women's workers participation in work force is increased then the Bihar condition may improve. However 21.67 percent respondents migrated because of seeking employment and debt repayment. From the result it can be concluded that employment was key factor for migration in the study area. With regard to factors influencing for out migration, respondents reported that searching for livelihood ranked 1st among all other factors with a mean score of 71.25. The result is broadly in line with Lal *et al.* (2017), who reported that in Bihar the key factors influencing out migration was 'non-availability of work which forced them to search for Livelihood in other states. Income disparity

ranked 2nd with a mean score of 55.15 and the finding is supported by Parameswaranik *et al.* (2020), who substantiated that 'low salary' was the major push factor of out-migration. Scarcity of resources was the third factor followed by marriage and relatives and friends.

From the Table 4 it is evident that the inter-state migration was famous among the respondent. Though respondents under this study have returned from 16 major states of country, these states are Maharashtra (15.33%), Delhi (13.33%), Haryana (10.00%), Karnataka (8.33%), Assam (8.00%), Gujarat (7.67%), Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (each 5.33%), Rajasthan & Telangana (5.00% each), Punjab (4.67%), Tamil Nadu (4.33%), Jharkhand (3.00%), Jammu and Kashmir (2.67%), Andhra Pradesh (1.33%) and Manipur (0.67%). The nature of work ranges from agricultural or casual labourers, construction workers, painter, plumber, labour in brick kiln, maid, factory workers, self employed, skilled workers etc.

Table 4: Destination for migration.

States	f	%	Nature of work
Maharashtra	46	15.33	Factory, construction, driver, self employed
Delhi	40	13.33	Driver, factory, food service, plumber
Haryana	30	10.00	Agriculture, casual labour, construction work
Karnataka	25	8.33	Automobile, painter, carpenter, casual labour
Assam	24	8.00	Agriculture (Tea garden), construction, factories
Gujarat	23	7.67	Self employed, tailor, electrician, construction
Uttar Pradesh	16	5.33	Unskilled labours, plumber, barber, vendor
West Bengal	16	5.33	Brick kiln, self employed, driver, casual labour
Rajasthan	15	5.00	Construction, casual labour, factory workers
Telangana	15	5.00	Brick kiln, security guard, construction
Punjab	14	4.67	Agriculture labours, factory workers, brick kiln
Tamil Nadu	13	4.33	Factory workers, carpenter, welder, maid
Jharkhand	9	3.00	Brick kiln, electrician, painter
Jammu And Kashmir	8	2.67	Self employed, casual labours
Andhra Pradesh	4	1.33	Agriculture, maid, supervisor
Manipur	2	0.67	Casual labours

CONCLUSION

The results concluded that major chunk of the migrant workers were functionally literate *i.e.* 43.67 percent and they had working experience of less than a decade *i.e.* 6.8 years. More than half (53.67 %) were unskilled laborers. The family income and self income of these migrant workers was reduced by 11.14 percent and 12.05 percent respectively. The debt status of migrant workers was increased by 15.32 percent after COVID-19 pandemic. Majority (55.67%) of these migrant workers were seasonal migrants and seeking employment was the key reason for migration for migration. Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana and others were top migration destinations. They were mainly engaged in works like agricultural or casual labourers, construction workers, painter, plumber, labour in brick kiln, maid, factory workers, self employed, skilled workers etc. However, since it is a pandemic induced situation so it may not possibly represent the normal situation of the study area.

FUTURE SCOPE

The present research study was confined to returnee migrants during COVID-19. Moreover, there is a need of socio-economic studies on female migrant workers alongside families of migrants left behind at native place.

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Conflict of Interest. None.

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