

Research Article

An investigation into the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers in Thiruvilai Panchayat, Tamil Nadu, India

S. Saranya Devi^{1*}, S. Selvi¹, G. Amalan Rabert²

¹PG & Research Department of Economics, A.V.C. College (Autonomous), Mannampandal, Mayiladuthurai – 609 305, Tamilnadu, India

²PG & Research Department of Botany, A.V.C. College (Autonomous), Mannampandal, Mayiladuthurai – 609 305, Tamilnadu, India

*Corresponding Author, Email: drssdeco@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: March 23, 2022 Revised: July 11, 2022 Accepted: July 12, 2022 Published: July 24, 2022</p> <p>Keywords: Agricultural Labourers, Economic Development, Employment</p>	<p>Agricultural progress is commonly considered as a prerequisite of economic development. While modern times associate economic growth with industrialization, it is widely acknowledged that a strong agricultural foundation is essential for industrialization to thrive. In developing economies, giving priority to agriculture is crucial to hasten economic advancement. Initially, agricultural operations were carried out by hired labourers. The Labour Enquiry Committee (1950-51) defined agricultural labourers as individuals who work for more than half of the total number of days in a year for wages. In the Indian society, agricultural labourers belong to the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, facing significant disadvantages such as low wages, poor working conditions, and irregular employment. Their earnings barely allow for a subsistence level of living, leading to hand-to-mouth existence. This paper aims to investigate the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers in the Thiruvilai Panchayat, Sirkali Taluk, Mayiladuthurai District of Tamil Nadu. The study indicates that wages are remarkably low, and steps should be taken to ensure these workers earn a regular and fair income. It suggests implementing equal pay for equal work in both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. Additionally, the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) could assist agricultural labourers during the off-season, necessitating an increase in wages and the number of days of employment.</p>

INTRODUCTION

India is predominantly an agricultural nation, and the significance of agriculture in its economy is undeniable. It stands as the largest and most crucial "industry" within the country. Approximately 75 percent of India's population relies on agriculture, either directly or indirectly, for their livelihood. This reliance on agriculture plays a pivotal role in promoting the economic development of the nation [1]. In the majority of emerging nations, the plight of agricultural laborers is getting worse [2]. Agriculture must be prioritized in a developing economy in order to quicken the pace of economic development [3]. India is primarily an agricultural nation, and the majority of its workers are agricultural laborers, who make up the bulk of the rural labor force. [4]. The advancement of agriculture is widely recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for fostering economic development in various countries. This critical connection between agriculture and economic growth is often likened to agriculture being the engine that propels a nation's economic progress forward. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the impact of agriculture on economic growth can vary significantly from one country to another, depending on diverse factors such as the country's natural resources, technological advancements, infrastructure, and policy frameworks [5].

In many developing economies, agriculture plays a central role in their economic landscape. The sector not only provides food and raw materials but also serves as a major source of employment for a considerable portion of the population. As such, improvements in agricultural productivity and output can have a profound impact on the overall well-being of rural communities and contribute significantly to poverty alleviation and income distribution [6]. For agrarian-based economies, agricultural progress can trigger a positive chain reaction across various sectors. As farmers' incomes increase due to improved productivity and better market access, their purchasing power rises, leading to increased demand for goods and services in both rural and urban areas. This, in turn, stimulates growth in non-agricultural sectors such as manufacturing, trade, and services, further driving the nation's overall economic growth [7]. The magnitude of agriculture's impact on economic development can

differ in countries with different levels of economic diversification. In some advanced economies, the relative importance of agriculture may be overshadowed by other thriving sectors like technology, finance, and industry. In such cases, while agriculture remains significant for food security and sustainability, its direct contribution to GDP and employment might be relatively smaller compared to more industrialized nations [8,9].

Countries that can effectively address these challenges and invest in modernizing their agricultural practices and infrastructure are more likely to experience substantial economic benefits from agricultural progress [10]. India has taken long "strides towards" economic progress. India's achievement both in industrial and the agricultural sectors are overshadowed by the continued existence of the condition of extreme poverty [11]. While it is indeed true that modern economic development is often linked to industrialization, there is a widely accepted belief that industrialization can only thrive when built upon a solid foundation in agriculture [2].

Agricultural women labourers

The role of women agricultural laborers is of significant importance in the rural economy. They make a substantial contribution to agricultural activities, forming a vital part of the workforce in India. A substantial proportion of agricultural labourers comprises women, playing a vital role in bolstering the rural economy. Although they form a significant part of India's workforce, women in this sector often face challenges compared to their male counterparts concerning the nature and quality of employment opportunities. The majority of women workers in agriculture are concentrated in rural areas [12]. A sizeable percentage of rural Indians work as women in agriculture. Like males, they engage in a variety of agricultural activities, as well as activities in related industries like forestry, plantations, fisheries, and live stock. Generally speaking, they are involved in these operations in different ways depending on their family's socioeconomic standing and other local conditions. They perform



labor for pay, perform unpaid work on their land as cultivators, or manage certain aspects of agricultural production by supervising labor and taking part in post-harvest processing, etc. [13].

Agricultural Labourers are on the lowest range of the socio-economic ladder of the Indian society. They formed the most disadvantaged group; their wages are typically low, conditions of work are poor and employment is frequently irregular. The level of living which their earnings permit is very meagre. They generally live from hand to mouth.

Objectives

The focus of the current study is on analyzing the socio-economic status of agricultural labourers. The first objective is to examine the Income and Expenditure pattern of agricultural labourers. This entails studying their sources of income, which may include wages from agricultural work, any supplementary earnings, or other sources of financial support. Simultaneously, the study will investigate how they allocate their earnings and assess their expenditure patterns, including expenses related to food, healthcare, education, housing, and other essential needs. Understanding the financial dynamics of agricultural laborers is crucial for identifying areas that require attention and improvement.

The second objective is to study the issues and challenges faced by agricultural labourers in the study area. This involves identifying the various socio-economic hardships and obstacles they encounter in their daily lives. These challenges may include insufficient wages, lack of access to social services, inadequate living conditions, limited employment opportunities, and any discrimination or exploitation they may face in the workplace. Understanding these issues is essential for formulating effective policies and interventions to improve the well-being of agricultural labourers.

The third and final objective is to suggest suitable policy measures for strengthening the socio-economic status of agricultural labourers. Based on the findings from the Income and Expenditure analysis and the study of issues and challenges, the researchers will propose concrete policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers. These policy measures may include advocating for better wages and working conditions, providing access to social welfare programs, improving access to education and healthcare, and implementing measures to combat discrimination and exploitation. The goal is to develop practical and impactful policies that can positively impact the lives of agricultural labourers and contribute to their overall socio-economic development.

By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights and actionable recommendations that can be utilized by policymakers, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders to uplift the socio-economic status of agricultural labourers, ultimately leading to improved livelihoods and better overall well-being for this vital segment of the population.

METHODS

The current research is designed to gather comprehensive insights, utilizing both Primary and Secondary Data sources. Primary Data refers to original information collected directly from the target population for the specific research purpose. Secondary Data, on the other hand, involves using pre-existing data from various sources, such as previous studies, government reports, or published literature.

To accomplish the research's intended goals, a sample of 50 Agricultural Labourers was conveniently chosen from Thiruvalli Panchayat, located in Sirkali Taluk. The convenience sampling method was employed to select participants due to its practicality and accessibility. Subsequently, personal interviews were conducted with these selected agricultural laborers to gather first-hand information directly from them.

Through these personal interviews, the researchers aimed to delve deep into the participants' perspectives, experiences, and challenges concerning their socio-economic conditions, work nature, and overall well-being. By combining both Primary and Secondary Data, the study sought to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the socio-economic conditions of agricultural laborers in the Thiruvalli Panchayat area, thus contributing valuable insights to the existing knowledge in this field.

RESULTS

1. Nearly (36%) of the respondents belong to the age group between 31-40 years followed by (30%) who belonged to the age group between below 30 years (Table 1).
2. 87% of the sample respondents are Male Labourers and the rest of 13% are Female Labourers.
3. Out of 50 sample respondents 84% are Hindu Religion followed by 16% are Christian Religion with no Muslim in the study area. The region is dominated by the Hindu Religion (Table 9).
4. Caste wise classification shows a maximum (36%) from Schedule Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) followed by (27%) from the Most Backward Class (MBC).
5. Majority of 80% of the respondents are married and 12% are unmarried respectively (Table 2).
6. The family type of the respondents is majority of (68%) of the respondents belonging to the nuclear family and remaining (32%) of the respondents are belonging to the joint family system (Table 4).
7. It is observed that maximum 37% of the sample respondents have family size 3-6 members.
8. Majority of 36% of the respondents are illiterate followed by 26% under 9th std to 12th std (Table 3).
9. It is clearly understood that 42% of respondents live in tiled houses followed by 34 % live in colony houses (Table 8).
10. It is observed from the respondents that maximum earned 42% earning monthly income Rs. 6,000- 9,000 followed by 32% are earning monthly income below Rs. 6,000 (Table 5).
11. The monthly expenditure wise classification shows that 64% spend Rs. 3, 440 on food items and spend Rs. 1988 percent on Non-Food Items.
12. Majority 34% borrowed money from moneylenders. 22% borrowed loan from state government organizations (Table 6).
13. It could be known from the study labourers are having savings habit. Most of them saved in the Post office and Nationalized Banks. Influence of SHGS may be the reason for the saving among the Labourers (Table 7).
14. 42% of the Agricultural Labourers are rearing cow followed by 12% are rearing goat/sheep, 8% are having bullocks and 30% are rearing poultry (Table 10).
15. According to banking facilities in the study area, 35% hold transaction in State Bank of India and 32% are having transaction in Indian Bank.
16. Regarding the possession of assets, the majority 43% possess both movable and immovable assets.
17. 60% of them received daily wages and 22% received wage fortnight and remaining 18% received wages weekly (Table 11).
18. Sometime the payments were delayed with a view to make the labourers depend more on land-owners. All the respondents receive their wages in the form of cash only.
19. Generally, they enter in the field at sunrise and toil in the sunset. Majority 40 per cent of the respondents work 12 hours per day during the harvesting period.
20. 62% are satisfied with their work. Due to lack of knowledge and skills in other occupations, the opportunities in the agricultural and non - agricultural activities are very limited.

21. The difficulties faced by the respondents to repay the borrowed money are collected and 72 % of them pay high rate of interest. (Table 13).
22. The sample respondents regarding opinion towards change of occupation responded that 40% per cent shift to some others occupation such as construction work and 34% are not willing to change the occupation because of health issues (Table 12).
23. The difficulties faced by the respondents due to agricultural modernization imply that 65 %of the respondents are affected while the 35% are not affected.
24. The Seasonal Employment, Liquor Addiction, Health Problem and Lack of Awareness are the important problem faced by Agricultural Labourers respectively (Table 14).

Table 1. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Age.

S. No.	Age group	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Below 30	15	30
2.	31- 40	18	36
3.	41- 50	11	22
4.	51 and above	6	12
	Total	50	100

Table 2. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Marital Status.

S. No.	Marital Status	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Married	40	80
2.	Un-Married	6	12
3.	Widow/ Widower	4	8
	Total	50	100

Table 3. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Educational Qualification.

S. No.	Educational Qualification	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Illiterate	18	36
2.	Below 8 th std	8	16
3.	9 th to 12 th std	13	26
4.	Under Graduate	11	22
	Total	50	100

Table 4. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Family Size.

S. No.	Family Size	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Below 3	17	34
2.	3 - 6	19	38
3.	Above 6	14	28
	Total	50	100

Table 5. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Income.

S. No.	Income	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Below Rs. 6,000	16	32
2.	Rs 6,000 – Rs 9,000	21	42
3.	Above Rs. 10,000	13	26
	Total	50	100

Table 6. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Source of Borrowings.

S. No.	Source of Borrowings	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Money Lender	17	34
2.	Neighbours	13	26
3.	Loan Received from Govt Organization	11	22
4.	land Owning Community	9	18
	Total	50	100

Table 7. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Savings.

S. No.	Savings	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Post office	11	22
2.	Private Finance	10	20
3.	Commercial Bank	9	18
4.	SHG	15	30
5.	LIC	5	10
	Total	50	100

Table 8. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Nature of House.

S. No.	Nature of House	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Thatched	6	12
2.	Tiled	20	40
3.	Terraced	7	14
4.	Colony	17	34
	Total	50	100

Table 9. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Religion Status.

S. No.	Nature of House	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Hindu	42	84
2.	Christian	8	16
3.	Muslim	0	0
	Total	50	100

Table 10. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Users of Livestock Rearing.

S. No.	Nature of House	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Cow	21	42
2.	Goat/Sheep	6	12
3.	Bullocks	8	16
4.	Poultry	15	30
	Total	50	100

Table 11. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Mode of Payment.

S. No.	Mode of Payment	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Daily	30	60
2.	Weekly	9	18
3.	Fort nightly	11	22
	Total	50	100

Table 12. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on Opinion about Change of Occupation.

S. No.	Mode of Payment	Number of Respondent	%
1.	Non Availability of Work	20	40
2.	Not Interested	13	26
3.	On Health Ground	17	34
	Total	50	100

Table 13. Socio Economic Status and Conditions of Agricultural Labourers based on difficulties to repay the loan.

S. No.	Mode of Payment	Number of Respondent	%
1.	High Interest Rate	36	72
2.	Low Wages	8	16
3.	Lack of Employment	4	8
4.	Lack of Savings	2	4
	Total	50	100

14. Problems faced by Agricultural Labourers.

S. No.	Problems	Rank
1.	Seasonal Employment	I
2.	Lack of Awareness	II
3.	Liquor Addiction	III
4.	Health Problem	IV
5.	Migratory Behaviour	V
6.	Lack of Demand	VI

Recommendations

To enhance the socioeconomic circumstances of agricultural laborers in the research region, the following ideas may be put forth:

1. Although agriculture is the primary occupation in this neighborhood, the pay is quite poor. Action may be taken to increase these workers' regular, reasonable incomes.
2. Although the MGNREGA program would aid agricultural laborers during the off-season, the pay and number of days of employment were pitifully inadequate. Therefore, it is necessary to raise the wage and the number of days worked.
3. Although the MGNREGA program would aid agricultural laborers during the off-season, the pay and number of days of employment were pitifully inadequate. Therefore, it is necessary to raise the wage and the number of days worked.
4. The investigation revealed to the researcher that agricultural workers are not paid right away after finishing their labor. After a while, they are paid. Therefore, it is recommended that agricultural workers be made aware of their rights and make a timely claim for their wages.
5. The analysis shows that there are no incentives offered to the landless farmers in this region. The researcher also learned that in some places, facilities are provided to laborers while they are at work. In addition, incentives are crucial for any type of labor in order to motivate employees to do more tasks well. In light of this, it is recommended that employers offer incentives to employees such as free tea, scheduled breaks, and access to transportation.
6. Government institutions and social organizations should step forward to establish rural-based industries like coir and cottage industries to provide employment to landless agricultural laborers all year round because they are unable to find work as agricultural laborers.
7. There is no association for agricultural laborers who are without land. To create a union in these places, the local leaders and administration should step up. This will enable them to obtain a fair income, adhere to reasonable working hours, and prevent exploitation.
8. There should be as little salary inequality between men and women as possible and between agricultural and non-agricultural jobs. Both agricultural and non-agricultural employment should adhere to the principle of equal pay for equal work.

CONCLUSION

The current investigation focuses on the socio-economic conditions of agricultural laborers. The findings indicate that these laborers are predominantly engaged in various agricultural tasks such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing, and threshing. Unfortunately, half of the laborers face challenges in obtaining sufficient nutritious food to sustain themselves due to their poor economic circumstances.

Moreover, a significant number of farm workers experience psychological distress due to the demanding nature of their work, domestic responsibilities, and economic hardships. Disturbingly, many laborers are subjected to overwork in the agricultural fields, and there are prevalent issues of discrimination based on gender, caste, and wage disparities in their workplace. Additionally, a considerable proportion of respondents express dissatisfaction

with their wages, which negatively impacts their ability to maintain a decent standard of living. During the off-season of agriculture, female agricultural laborers tend to seek alternative employment opportunities through the MGNREGA's 100 days of work program.

The study provides a clear explanation that the majority of agricultural workers are deeply burdened by severe economic hardships, leaving them with little possibility of escaping their impoverished state. Even basic day-to-day activities become difficult for many respondents. Over the years since Independence, both the central and state governments have implemented certain measures to enhance the economic situation of agricultural laborers. If all the suggestions outlined in the study are effectively implemented, there is a genuine hope for significant improvements in employment opportunities and an overall increase in the standard of living for agricultural laborers. These changes could potentially lead to transformative improvements in their lives.

REFERENCES

1. Babu PS, Ganesan S. A Study on Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Agricultural Labourers in Sivagangai District. *J. Commerce*. 2018;6(3):12–24.
2. Mariyappan P. A sociological study on the landless agricultural labourers in Cuddalore Dt. Tamil Nadu: Lulu Publication; 2021.
3. Lv D, Gao H, Zhang Y. Rural economic development based on shift-share analysis in a developing country: A case study in Heilongjiang province, China. *Sustainability*. 2021;13(4):1969. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su13041969>
4. Singh J, Dutta T, Rawat A, Singh N. Changing role of agriculture in income and employment, and trends of agricultural worker productivity in Indian States. *Indian J Econ Dev*. 2020;16(2s):183–9.
5. Irandoust M. Industrial growth versus agricultural growth in eight post-communist countries. *Struct Chang Econ Dyn*. 2022;62:529–37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.strueco.2022.06.008>
6. Reganold JP, Wachter JM. Organic agriculture in the twenty-first century. *Nat Plants*. 2016;2:15221. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nplants.2015.221>
7. Wolfert S, Ge L, Verdouw C, Bogaardt MJ. Big data in smart farming—a review. *Agricultural Systems*. 2017;153:69–80.
8. Ecker O. Agricultural transformation and food and nutrition security in Ghana: Does farm production diversity (still) matter for household dietary diversity? *Food Policy*. 2018;79:271–82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2018.08.002>
9. Anderson K. Agriculture in a more uncertain global trade environment. *Agric Econ*. 2022;53(4):563–79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/agec.12726>
10. De Janvry A, Sadoulet E. Using agriculture for development: Supply- and demand-side approaches. *World Dev*. 2020;133.
11. Mama ML. Promoting agriculture amongst the black youth of South Africa: the role the sector has to play in creating employment, alleviating poverty, and achieving equitable economic growth (Doctoral dissertation). Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University; 2020.
12. Sundari S. Female labour supply in Tamil Nadu: Some questions. *Indian J Gend Stud*. 2021;28(1):67–89. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0971521520974868>
13. Gopaldasundar R. The Socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers in thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu in India. *Economics*. 2020;8(4):54–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34293/economics.v8i4.3272>