



Lockdown-2020 and Livelihood of Migrant Women Workers in Jharkhand

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Abstract: The entire globe faces a very precarious situation during pandemic Covid-19. During national lockdown in India, it was hazardous for the migrant labourers and more unsafe for women migrant workers. They came across many livelihood challenges like: employment, nutrition, government support, societal security, health facility, etc. which were repeatedly underlined in numerous mass media news. Therefore, to know the actual problems encountered by the women migrant returnees, this particular study was undertaken in Jharkhand state where most of women workers go on migration for earning. For the purpose, 41 women migrant returnees were randomly selected as respondents from 18 villages covering five blocks of the state. By the use of a survey schedule, data was collected in the arena of socio-economic outline, place of migration, reason of migration, sector of engagement, income, difficulties confronted and support need from government for livelihood enhancement which are pronounced in this study.

Keywords: migrant women labourers, lockdown, livelihood

Introduction: Women face a number of challenges for their livelihood specially during natural disasters and disease pandemic. During covid-19 pandemic, women have encountered livelihood challenges in the field of wage earning, small business, family occupation, domestic exploitation, facilities from government, reduced employment opportunity, remuneration paid in time, etc. The nationwide lockdown in India affected livelihood of millions of women migrant workers across the country. They were hit hard while walking back home for hundreds of kilometres with no social safety and little access to family support. There were several reports of migrant woman who delivered baby while walking back home. The hardships faced by these women were highlighted in the media reports. Another report on migrant laborers in north India found that around 92% had lost their work, and 42% were negatively impacted with no food or supplies (Jan Sahas 2020). There were also reduced access to maternal, new-born and child health services, increased domestic violence, decline in employment, reduced social security, etc. COVID-19 has unevenly impacted women and girls in the domains of health, economy, social protection, and gender-based violence (UN 2020). The COVID-19 crisis is expected to have a long-term impact on informal sector workers (International Labor Organization 2020) as they are



the most vulnerable communities and are more exposed to the current global pandemic (Sengupta and Jha [2020](#)). It was also reported that the care burden that COVID-19 would result in a long-term shock for poor people in the informal sector. Extreme poverty and food scarcity were flagged as issue for most informal sector workers (Khan and Mansoor [2020](#)). A recent study analyzing the situation of women in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Australia, and Vietnam, indicated that the COVID-19 outbreak had disproportionately impacted women, and they have an increased reproductive burden (McLaren et al. [2020](#)). Keeping the above facts in view, an investigation was made in Jharkhand state of India to understand the actual livelihood problems faced by the women migrant workers during corona pandemic.

About Jharkhand:

Jharkhand being the 15th largest state by area, and 14th largest by population. It has an area of 79,710 km² with 24 districts, 260 blocks, and 32,620 villages. The gross domestic product of Jharkhand is estimated at ₹3.83 lakh crore in 2020–21. The per capita GDP of Jharkhand in 2018-19 was 82,430. (Jharkhand Budget Analysis 2020-21). Agriculture is an important sector in the economy of Jharkhand besides the cottage industry and IT industry. Figures from the Ministry of Rural Development show that only 25.63 lakh out of Jharkhand's 53.36 lakh job cards are active — less than half. In all, Jharkhand has 91.75 lakh registered workers, of which 33.26 lakh are active (2020). Farmers in the state produce several crops, vegetables, milk and egg. Jharkhand is the pioneer state in implementing "Single Window System for farmers" with support of weather forecast, crop insurance, availability of seeds, market linkage etc. (Agriculture Scenario in Jharkhand, 2018).

According to the 2011 Indian Census, Jharkhand has a population of 32.96 million with 16.93 million males and 16.03 million females. About 39.1% of its population is below the poverty line. The state has a large number of work force in the unorganized sector. Approximately one lakh workers are employed in its construction projects out of which around 60,000 workers are local whereas the rest are hired migrant labourers. More than 7.0 lakh people of Jharkhand work in states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Nagaland. Based on the report, out of total migrated labourers, nearly 5.0 lakh had returned by Shramik Special trains, buses and flights after national lockdown. Recent research showed that the pandemic had exacerbated the existing disparities, further deteriorating the conditions of poor and migrant workers (Che, Du, and Chan [2020](#); Baas [2020](#)). The lives and livelihood of poor communities in south-Asian countries had also been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 (Hamiduzzaman and Islam [2020](#)) and similar observations were also seen for migrant workers in India (Bhagat et al. [2020](#)). Migrant workers who remained in their urban enclaves also encountered similar experiences (The Hindu [2020](#); Bailwal and Taniya 2020).

Migration Report of Jharkhand:

The migrant workers are indispensable but mostly invisible key actors in cities' development. Rural migrants are socially portable, culturally stretchy and economically ambitious people. They are most susceptible to monetary exploitation. The contribution of migrants is estimated to be more than 10% to the country's GDP. India has a vast workforce with more than 450 million people in the informal sector (Sharma 2020). According to one estimate, about 90% of women work in informal sectors, of which 20% work in urban areas (Geetika, Singh and Gupta 2011). More recent numbers revealed that there



are about 326 million internal migrants in India (NSSO, 2007-08) i.e. nearly 30% of the total population. Almost 70% of all the migrants are women.

Materials and Methods:

The study was conducted during September, 2020 in Jharkhand state of India covering 18 villages (Khatnai, Mohbanna, Maheshpur, Bariatha, Kasturia, Logay, Charka, Maheshlitti, Sondiha, Kurmichak, Shahri, Belbathan, Sondiha, Tulsikitta, Nonmati, Basbhitta, Chilra, Ghatbaghabandh) in five blocks like Godda, Basantrai, Pathargama, Poraiyahat and Mahagama. Jharkhand was purposefully identified as a large number of women workers migrate outside the state for their livelihood. A total of 41 women migrant returnees were randomly selected as respondents for data collection. A structured questionnaire on various aspects of the indicators of livelihood were taken for the study.

Result and Discussion:

Socio-Economic Profiles: Socio-economic profile of the respondents were studied with respect to age, education, marital status, size of land holding and major livelihood sources. The responses on the above aspects are classified in the following table.

Table 1. Socio-Economic profile of the respondents (n=41)

1	Age category	21-30 yr	31-40 yr	41-50 yr	Total
	% respondent	12.19	48.79	39.02	100
2	Education level	Upto 7 th	Upto 10 th	Above 10 th	
	% respondent	39.02	46.34	14.64	100
3	Marital status	Married	Unmarried	-	
	% respondent	87.81	12.19	-	100
4	Size of landholding	Landless	Less than 1 acre	More than 1 acre	
	% respondent	9.75	90.25	0	100
5	Sources of income	Farming	Wage earning	Any other	
	% respondent	87.81	12.19	0	100

The above table revealed that, majority of the women migrant workers (48.79%) were in the age group of 31 – 40 years followed by 41 – 50 years (39.02%) while only 12.19% were in the age of 21 – 30 years. It indicates that the most dynamic age for workers is 31 to 40 years when they are able to work hard. There is need for the government to focus on this particular age group (31-49 years) for any developmental work. Similarly, majority of the respondents were educated up to 10th level (46.34%) and married (87.81%). Over 90% of the migrant women workers had less than one acre of cultivated land and farming was major livelihood source for 87.81% of them. None of the workers possessed more than one acre of land. The married women preferred to go as migrant workers with their husbands while the unmarried girls stayed back at their native places.



Place of Migration: The respondents from Jharkhand choose Patna, Ranchi, Bhagalpur, Muradabad, Vardhaman, Begusarai and Rajkot in Bihar as the place of migration. Further, Odisha, Delhi, Maharastra, Dadar Nagar, Haweli, Hyderabad and West Bengal were the preferred places for women for migration other than their own state.

Reasons of Migration: The reasons for migration by the women respondents have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons for migration by women (n = 41)

Sl. No.	Reasons of Migration	% respondent
1	To earn money	90.24
2	Not to stay with the in-laws	0.00
3	For better education of the children	0.00
4	To stay with husband	9.76
5	Any other	0.00
Total		100.00

The main reason of migration was the economic compulsion (90.24%). To join their husbands working at far off places 9.76% women chose to migrate. For these migrant women workers, other reasons were not important. Therefore, if there would have been employment opportunities for these women they would not have migrated and hence livelihood opportunities should be created for them near their places of residences.

Period of Working: The duration of migration as revealed by these women respondents are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Duration of working as migrant worker (41)

Sl. No.	Period of working	% respondent
1	Less than 1 year	0.00
2	1 – 2 years	0.00
3	2 – 3 years	4.88
4	3 – 4 years	12.19
5	More than 4 years	82.93
	Total	100.00

The period of working as migrant workers was more than four years for majority of the women (82.93%). Only 12.19% and 4.88% of them worked for three to four years and two to three years,



respectively. All the respondents who were contacted worked for longer duration for over 3 years to continuously support their families.

Migration and Sector of Employment: The types of work taken up by the migrant women indicated that these women mostly took up the work of labour in brickkiln, cooking for others, construction workers etc. Over 90 percent of the migrant women took up work of one or the other kind and 7.3% of them migrated to join their husbands. Only 2.4 % of these women migrated with their whole family.

Table 4. Migration and sector of employment (n=41)

Pattern of migration		% respondents
i)	Self	7.32
ii)	With husband	90.25
iii)	With whole family	2.43
Sector of employment during Migration		
i)	No Work	7.31
ii)	Any other (brickkiln, cooking for others, construction labour, factory, sale counter of cloth shops etc.)	92.69

As depicted in the above table, most of the respondents had migrated with their husbands (90.25%) while only 2.43% of them migrated with whole family. However, self-migration was observed in case of 7.32% of women who migrated neither with husbands nor with whole family. Furthermore, about 92.69% of women migrants were employed in the sectors like: Bhatti, construction, factory, selling clothes, in other homes as cook, etc. whereas, 7.31% of them had no work rather they had only accompanied their husbands at the time of migration.

Table 5. Earning of the migrant women (n=41)

Sl. No.	Earning per Month	% respondent
1	No income	7.31
2	Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 10000/-	0.00
3	Rs. 10001/- to Rs. 15000/-	92.69
4	Rs. 15001/- to Rs. 20000/-	0.00
5	More than Rs. 20000/-	0.00
	Total	100.00

The monthly earnings of the women workers were in the range of Rs 10000/- to 15000/- and it appears that they were all paid adequately earning Rs.300 to 500/- per day.



Problems Faced by Farm Women during Lockdown:

The lockdown imposed to contain the spread of Covid-19 caused great hardship to the women workers because they were deprived of the regular they were earning. Since it was an extended lockdown, most of the employers did not pay them during this period. Similar observations were also reported by Mishra *et al.* (2021). According to Chakraborty (2020) women are potentially affected more because in many contexts they are considered to be less productive and subsequently have a lower position and rank in society. UN Women (2020) reported that women face loss of livelihood, suffer human rights violations besides other hardships when pandemic befall. The various social- psychological issues faced by women during the lockdown has been summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 Problems faced by Farm Women during Lockdown

S. no.	Problems faced during Lockdown	% respondents	Rank
1	Financial (job loss)	100.00	I
2	Mental (fear, anxiety, stress, etc.)	100.00	I
3	Nutritional (food, water, etc.)	58.53	II
4	Social (violence, abuse, isolation, etc.)	48.78	III
5	Medical (health care)	4.87	IV
6	Shelter (rented house)	0.00	-
7	Any other	0.00	-

Most of the respondents had lost their jobs and all of them faced severe financial constraints. According to Kamanga-Njikhoad Tajik (2020), Female-headed families are significantly affected by COVID-19 and are unable to meet household needs due to the lack of economic options. Simultaneously, cases of was mental stress, anxiety and fear were reported by all the women migrant workers. They had the fear of not being allowed to meet their family members upon return to home. Similar studies among the general population have been reported about significant psychological impacts of COVID-19 (Varshney *et al.* 2020). Additionally, 48.78% of respondents faced other social problems like violence, abuse and isolation while 58.53 % had to pass the period without sufficient nutrition (food and water). The COVID-19 crisis was likely to pose a challenge to food security and malnutrition (Khanna 2020). Dahir (2020) reported that the COVID-19 crisis is adding more complexity to hunger and estimated that 265 million people would face acute hunger by the end of 2020. Further, only two of the respondents (4.87%) faced the health issue and fortunately none of them had shelter (rented house) or any other problem. The situation is critical in countries like India during the pandemic, where access to healthcare for migrant workers is a challenge even in normal circumstances (Suresh, James, and Balraju 2020).

Present Engagement after Return:

When the women migrants lost their jobs at the place of work, they were bound to return to native places. Foley and Piper (2020) studied that the pandemic and subsequent measures to control its spread have posed profound social, economic, and structural challenges to migrant workers across



many countries. The work taken up by these women upon return to their homes have been given in table 7.

Table 7. Present Engagement after return (41)

Sl. No.	Present Engagement after return	%
1	Farming	82.93
2	Wage earning	14.64
3	Business	2.43
4	Service	0.00
5	Any other	0.00
6	Total	100.00

Upon return to their homes, the migrant workers mostly took up farming (82.9%) followed by wage earning (14.6%) Only 2.43 of them took up petty business selling items from their homes. None of them found work in other sectors.

Support Need from Government: The support desired by these women have been summarized in table 8. Most of them looked to the government to help them tide over this unprecedented crisis.

Table 8. Support Need from Government (41)

Sl. No.	Support Need from Government	f	%
1	Free critical inputs	41	100.00
2	Capacity building	41	100.00
3	Bank credit	41	100.00
4	Insurance	0	0.00
5	Government Health Card	0	0.00
6	BPL Card	0	0.00
7	Free house	0	0.00
8	Any other	0	0.00

The major three needs identified by all the respondents were access to bank credit, free critical inputs and capacity building. Therefore, governments should create credit facility along with free supply of critical inputs so that they are able to build their livelihood afresh. In addition, capacity building and training should also be given to these women migrants.

Conclusion: Adequate livelihood options with better wages should be created in village areas with viable schemes to provide avenues of employment in own locality. The slogan of 'Local is Vocal' should be given top priority to reduce migration rate and simultaneously to bring back the migrants from cities to their own villages. The gender issues like discrimination, exploitation and trafficking should be prevented for migrant women workers.



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