



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS TRIGGERING PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS IN MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

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Abstract

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combination of education, income and occupation. Research during the past indicate that SES is related to Psychological distress (Lazarino, Hamer, Stamatakis & Steptoe, 2013) psychological distress is to describe unpleasant feeling or emotions that impact the level of functioning and interfere with activities of daily living, In our country, with the growth of industrialization, building construction has taken a leap ahead of everything and A&N islands too experienced this leap. With the growth of construction sector in the islands, a good number of skilled and unskilled workers are required. Most of the man power required here fulfilled through migratory workers from Mainland India. The workers are confined to their contractors and living shelters provided by these contractors which often lack basic amenities. This study proposes to follow the methodology based on grounded theory. The grounded theory research design is a qualitative research design. That mainly uses systematic sets of procedures and steps to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon. Theoretical sampling method was used to collect the data for generating a theory. Small individual interview sessions lasting upto 60 minutes in average was conducted to know how socio-economic status leads to Psychological distress in migrant construction workers in A&N islands. Since the research is qualitative in nature and follows grounded theory, data's were analysed using NVIVO.

Keywords: *Socio economic status, Psychological distress, migratory, unskilled, skilled.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Psychological distress is a term which incorporates a number of psychological risk factors including symptoms of mental illness, anxiety, stress, distraction that interfere with the activities of daily living. Since psychological distress is a subjective experience which can result in negative views of the environments, work place, towards others and to a good extend to one self itself. Socio-economic status place an important role in the quality of life and Psychological wellbeing of an individual (Alex, 2016). Low Socio-economic status is often associated with a wide range of stressful situation. Socio-economic status is often measured

as a combination of education, income, & occupation (Adler, Boyce, Chesney, Cohen, Folkman, Kahn & Syme, 1994). When viewed through a social perspective the life events and poor coping skills are responsible for the onset of Psychological distress in people of lower Socio- economic strata. Low SES and one of its main co-relate which is lower education is the reason behind inadequate coping skills. Research says that children from low SES community develop academic skill more slowly compare to other children from the higher SES groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier & Maczuga, 2009). An Individual from low socio demographic background are more likely to live in low quality neighbourhoods where literacy rate is usually low which negatively affect the pre academic skills of children residing in that area. Moreover the school system in low economic status communities are often under resourced which leads low academic progress, increased dropout rates and thus perpetuating the low SES status of the community (Aikens& Barbarin, 2008). Things loop in the low socio-economic communities keeps the community members within the web itself. Socio-economic and living standards of migrate construction workers are very discouraging in India (Manoj & Viswanth, 2015). The construction sector in our country is one of the most impact sectors which contributes towards the economic of the country. It is also the largest and oldest sector which generates employment in India, which is next to agriculture sector (Patel, Moitra, Momin & Kantharia, 2012). Construction activity is an integral part of a countries infrastructure which includes hospitals, schools, township, and other offices along with urban infrastructure like water supply, drainage etc. (Balaji & Das, 2015). The nature of work in this sector is as such that work more, get more and there is no holiday for the workers. The socioeconomic conditions of these migrant workers are far below the desirable level, due to the informal nature of the employment. The migrant workers are mostly poorly educated which renders them to a vulnerable economic and social life in the city (Mukherjee, Paul& Pathan, 2009). Most of the workers in the construction sector comes under informal sector and the workers are not able to organise themselves in per suit of their common interest. The employers in this informal sector may prefer migrant workers as it is easier to exploit them and they are under direct control. Moreover the employers are the local guardian for the migrant workers. They have to accept the offered wages and living conditions provided by the employer as their last resort.

The uncertain working hours, lack of basic amenities and inadequate welfare facilities are the major drawbacks of their sector. The fragile employer- employee relationship and the temporary nature of employment, risks associated with work and work place lead to

psychological distress among workers. The added factors are poor living conditions provided by the employer, lack of health benefits and recreational facilities.

In A& N islands, temporary sheds can be seen in all major construction sites where these migratory workers live and the living conditions are often pathetic and unhygienic. The workers are often made to confine within the work site itself and their life style resembles the condition of convicts of penal settlement days of A&N islands. Very few studies were conducted on the Psychological risk factors faced by migrant construction workers. The present study focused on the psychological distress faced by migrant construction workers of A&N islands. please contact the conference publications committee as indicated on the conference website. Information about final paper submission is available from the conference website.

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MAJOR CONCEPTS

(a) Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is the measure of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families and communities. The definitions of SES emphasize that, as a construct it is conditional and is imposed on people. Further it is used for comparisons and is based on economics, opportunity and means of influence. The factors that are usually considered in establishing SES are income, occupation and education (Borgan,2009)

(b) Psychological Distress

Psychological distress has been characterized by a range of symptoms including lack of enthusiasm, problems with sleep , feeling downhearted or blue, feeling hopeless about the future, and feeling “emotional”(Burnette & Mui, 1997; Decker, 1997). Studies of psychological distress in the social sciences typically use the number of depressive symptoms as a measure of distress. Investigations among the general population have identified that lower socioeconomic status (SES) as risk factors for psychological distress (Lincoln, Taylor, Watkins, & Chatters, 2010).

(c) Migration

Migration is a universal phenomenon, which existed with the subsistence of the human beings on earth. People migrate from one place to another for several reasons, but the goal or

main reason behind changing the residence would be improving their living conditions or to escape from debts and poverty. Migration is also a social phenomenon which influences human life, the environment and has a great impact on any geographical area (Virupaksha, Kumar & Nirmala, 2014).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) How does Socio-economic status impact the physical health of migrant construction workers in Andaman & Nicobar Islands?
- 2) How does Socio-economic status impact social relationship of migrant construction workers in Andaman & Nicobar Islands?
- 3) How does Socio-economic status impact the Psychological relationship of construction workers in Andaman & Nicobar Islands?
- 4) How does Socio-economic status impact the Environmental mastery of migrant construction workers in Andaman & Nicobar Islands?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to explore how socioeconomic status triggers psychological distress on migrant construction workers of A&N islands.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study proposes to follow the methodology based on grounded theory. Grounded theory is a research method that involves forming a theory based on the gathered data as opposed to gathering data after forming a theory. It is a systematic way of generating theory from the research

This study was conducted among the migrant construction workers presently working in the Islands and is staying in accommodation provided by their respective employer.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this study were migrated workers from the mainland India who arrived at the islands in search of their livelihood and find their work destination in the construction sector of A&N islands.

INSTRUMENT

The research engaged the participants in an open – ended exploratory discussion using the tool in depth interview. Small interview sessions lasting approximately 50 to 70 minutes were conducted with the migrant construction workers at their residence to know the relationship between socio-cultural status and psychological distress among the migrant construction workers of A&N islands.

PROCEDURE

The views of participants on different aspects of socio-economic status, and Psychological distress were collected through open-ended exploratory discussion using the tool in-depth interview. The interview sessions were conducted in Hindi. In some of the interviews a translator was also engaged for elaborating certain questions in Bengali, where the subject was not able to understand certain questions in Hindi. The whole interview sessions were recorded, the recording were converted into English transcripts for its further analysis. The transcripts were converted into codes and these codes were further refined and converted into concepts and categories.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Migration is a universal phenomenon and people have been migrating from one place to another for improving their living conditions. A&N islands witnessed independent migration from almost every Indian state. The result of migration has given birth to many communities in the islands (Anderson, 2003). Migration is a social phenomenon in which people adapt a new environment. When there is no proper preparation and lack of social support migrants may experience distress. Most of the time migration is a vulnerable factor to develop Psychological distress. The main factors are insecurity feeling, non-availability of their own community and Socio-economic status would result in Psychological distress (Virupaksha et al.,2014) migration compounded by illiteracy, poor working condition, lack of infrastructure and security, inadequate health facilities make these workers a vulnerable population (Patel, Moitra et al., 2012). They are also regarded as the prototype of extremely demanding jobs tagged as dirty, dangerous and difficult (Patel et al, 2012). The rural to urban migration in India is mainly based on employment resulted from dilapidated rural economic system that is rooted in agriculture (Mukherjee et al., 2009). Most of the migrant labourers are coming to the islands with the expectation to earn more by living here for a limited period. Moreover they are satisfied with the continuous work they receive which is a regular source of income. Most of the workers want to work for a limited period ranging from 1 to 5 years and want to settle down in their own native place by doing something by themselves (Mukherjee et al., 2009). Although they earn, yet they are not satisfied with their livings and are in the grip of distress all the time. Most of them are unaware about the social security schemes and remain as a vulnerable population (Patel et al., 2012). Social-economic status by itself is not the only reason for distress, rather the day to day life events and inadequate coping skills are correlated with the status (Alex, 2016). Materials standards of living or other life circumstances

also influence depression and are related to each other (Alex, 2016). The nature of work is such that the workers work on all days and there are no holidays. Employers only focus on work and believe in the principle of more work, more payment and less work, less payment (Balaji & Das, 2015). These migrant workers are mostly academically backward and consequently they do give much importance their children, and expect them also to start earning as early as possible. This loop goes on people in the low SES remain in that group only and in long run their descendants are also forced to follow the same status (Marks, 1999). The migratory workers generally stay at the site for limited period and then move to another constructions site (Pal,2014). The workers lack bargaining power and are forced to accept in conducive working environment and the wages fixed by the employer. Even in case of disputes these workers are having little strength to fight with their employer (Manoj & Viswanath, 2015). There are several relationship between socio-economic position and the measures of psychological distress. Migrant workers with low socio-economic status had more depressive symptoms and higher level of psychological distress (Lincoln, Taylor, Watkins & Chatters, 2010) A&N Islands have also turned into a hub of migrant construction workers. This research seems to address the gap in the literature by examining how socio-economic status of migrant construction workers will trigger psychological distress in the working conditions existing in A&N Islands.

RESULT

The transcripts of the interviews collected were coded into daily activities, medical facilities, comfort level, sleep, rest, appearance, positive feelings, self-esteem, self-belief, thinking, personal relationship, social support, relationship with others, financial resources, physical safety, social security, living conditions. The codes are further classified into four categories i.e. physical health, psychological relationship, social relationship and environment. The living conditions of the migrant workers are not hygienic and they spend their days in the temporary sheds provided to them by their owners. The living conditions mentioned by the participants are (all names are pseudonyms):

“I live here in this small shed like house. I don’t like this place but I cannot do anything as it is my owner’s house. We anyhow have to stay here, we cannot do anything and cannot go anywhere from here.” (Participant PKT).

“If I stay in a rented room, I would be able to send less money to my home. If I stay in this place itself where I am living now, I can save money and able to spend more money to home.”

Here I am living with many difficulties but I am living in this condition to save some money” (Participant AJ).

“My living conditions are not good here. You can find holes in the walls” (Participant NN).

More commonly, the migrant workers consider themselves as weaker sections of the society and their self esteem level is also very low. There was direct and overt reference to various such comments:

“I always listen to my inner consciousness. Five different people may say five different things, but I always hear to my inner consciousness. If someone talks with me in high pitch or punches me, I won’t punch him as I don’t have that much of status.”(Participant AJ)

The migrant workers rarely receive any social support from the community. They are often excluded from all social groups and for that reason they would like to live and move in groups only.

“I don’t have money. So how can I compare myself with others? Sometimes I feel that others are happy so why can’t I be one among them” (Participant PKT).

“I sometime feel loneliness. My friends are in Kolkata and I’m here. I don’t want to stay here in these islands for a long time” (Participant JN).

“Here sometimes I feel boredom, but that’s not too much because here we five to six people live together” (Participant KV).

When concerns were raised about their financial resources, physical safety and security, participants discussed their daily routine and future plans. As one participant put it:

“I send money to my parents every month and they are happy with me.”... “I believe that I’ll construct my own house” (Participant PKT).

Another participant commented:

“I earn 400 rupees daily, half I spend for my daily routines and half of the money I save”...

“I don’t have many dreams, but I wish to have a house of two bedrooms, and for that only i am saving the money” (Participant AJ).

CONCLUSION

The results clearly reveal that socio-economic status of the migratory construction workers of the islands is very low. Moreover geographical isolation of the islands also makes them serve their period of stay in the islands as a punishment term. The average monthly income of the workers comes around 12,000 and most of them desires to earn a good amount for tenure of 5 to 7 years depending upon their requirement and subsequently wants to settle down in their own home town.

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