

# A Study on Working -Conditions of Small Coffee Plantation Workers in Chikmagaluru- Karnataka

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## **Abstract:**

*South India is the land of plantation crops. Among these coffee has pre-eminent position in view of its popularity. Coffee in Karnataka is cultivated in the area of 219,550 MTs has account for 20.69% of the national acreage. In Chikamagaluru has 77,900 MTs of coffee plantation.*

*Coffee and Tea plantations are labor intensive industries. This study is to find the socio-economic status of employees in small coffee plantations in Chikamagaluru, Karnataka.*

*The study focus on the living condition, wages, earnings and socio security benefits. A total of 286 respondent from small acreage coffee plantations form the sample. The questionnaire is the major tool in collecting data. Convenient sampling techniques is involved. Percentage analysis is used for analysis and interpretation. The important factor for their development and the problem faced by the employees are also identified.*

*Though Plantation Labour Act has many provisions of benefits to be given to the workers, very little has be done in reality, employees are not aware and also plantation growers feel the pressure of rising prices and competition nearby cutting out on employee benefits to be given.*

*Though the law is in place, enforcement and implementations has to be given priority. Basic amenities and facilities are to be provided for these workers to have social and financial inclusion.*

**Key words:** *Small acreage coffee plantation, working conditions, basic amenities, The Plantation Labour Act implementation*

## **Introduction:**

Plantation work being agriculture in nature is carried out on large pieces of land or estates that are remotely located. With the majority of land used for coffee cultivation, yield per hectare of Arabica and Robusta variety stands out higher in Kodagu, Chikamagaluru, than in any other district of the country. The yield invariably depends upon on the performance of the workers employed be it

permanent or the temporary ones. The labor force in Kodagu is a multi-cultural one comprising besides locals, migrants from Mysore, North Karnataka, North India, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

September 29 marks National Coffee Day in the U.S. Throughout the month of September, Human Nature is publishing a special series of reports on the sustainable coffee challenge, a coalition working to make coffee the world's sustainable agricultural product.

India is one of the important coffee producing countries in the world. India accounts for only 4.5 percent of the total area under coffee in the world. Coffee production in India is more concentrated in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Now coffee is also grown in Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal and Orissa. Coffee contributes about 3 to 4 percent to the G.D.P of the country. It provides more jobs to the women labourers who are not educated. Pruning and weeding of coffee trees, and picking the ripe cherries, is all done by hand on the vast majority of farms, and this labor accounts for up to 60 percent of production costs. Meanwhile, climate change, disease outbreaks and price fluctuations can disrupt traditional labor patterns and lead to labor shortages and create conditions for poor labor practices.

Plantation sector is very labour intensive and it requires skilled labourers. Plantation laborers perform all the activities in the coffee plantation like pruning, picking beans of coffee, spraying pesticides, pulping, digging and handling sprinklers.

The workers at the coffee plantations are one of the most exploited workers with working hours ranging from morning till late night, the wages received being only \$0.47 a day. Such miserable pay severely affects the daily lives of the coffee workers.

The present research work tries to look into the socio-economic conditions and existing socio-economic problems of laborers of coffee plantations in Karnataka, by focusing on their housing conditions, wage level, human treatment and the legal laws that exists to protect the rights of laborers of coffee plantations. This work tries to fulfil the objectives of understanding the socio-economic conditions of laborers in coffee plantations. It highlights the problem of laborers and analyses the socio-economic conditions of laborers in coffee plantation and looks into the governmental policies that have not substantially reached in improving the socio-economic conditions of laborers of coffee plantations.

### **Coffee Plantation workers in India: A Review**

Plantations can be classified into three categories: Large corporate plantations, medium to large private plantations, small plantations. Coffee plantation ownership is basically of two types: Private or individual or family ownership and professionally managed large corporate plantations.

The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 (PLA) is an important institutional intervention which provides for the welfare of the plantation workers and regulates the working and living conditions in the plantations. It contains provisions pertaining to housing, health, education and social welfare.

This act enacted by the central government is administered by the state government. The large corporate plantations are strictly obligated to adhere to the provisions of PLA and they employ large number of workers on a permanent roll whereas the medium and small plantations rely on a minimum number of permanent workers supplemented by seasonal contract workers. In the medium sized plantations, some form of housing, education and health support is provided but the small size of operations make it quite difficult and unrealistic to fully comply with the requirements of the Act.

Women workers have been an integral part of the plantation work force. When compared to all sectors, it is the plantation sector which employs more women and sometimes the phrase 'feminisation' of work in plantation is justified. Majority of workers in the coffee plantation, that is more than fifty five percent are women. A recent labour statistics report states that 62.72% of the workers in the coffee plantations of Karnataka are women and coffee engages maximum women when compared to other plantation crops.

The workers are entitled to minimum wages as per the Minimum Wages Act. The permanent workers are entitled to Provident Fund (PF), yearly bonus, medical facilities, and maternity benefits in addition to free housing, water and fuel. Gratuity is provided after five continuous years of service. Many plantations with permanent workers do not adhere to the provisions of PLA. Also the workers are not too keen on the PLA wages and benefits as many planters offer better pay than PLA requirements. If more than 20 casual workers are employed, they are to be covered by PF. But they seldom avail it as they do not want deductions from their salary and also they do not want to bond themselves to a particular plantation.

Casual workers including the contract ones negotiate a higher wage of around Rs. 300 to Rs.350. For certain operations such as tree pruning, the wages are around Rs. 450 to Rs.500. Hence to conclude, coffee as a plantation crop occupies a strategic position in the Indian economy as it is a foreign exchange earner and an employment generator especially for the unskilled rural populace, in particular women. Being a highly labour intensive sector, the contribution of the workforce is enormous.

### Review of literature

1. Mahalakshmi, Assistant professor, Bharthiar University Art and Science College, Dec 2012 (IJSETR) volume 1, in her study on the Socio-economic status of women employees in tea plantation industries found out that no. of women workers are facing many problem in the tea plantation. Since women workers are engaged more than the male workers. The study is basically focus on their living condition, wages earning and socio-security benefit. The important factor for their development and the problem faced by the employees are also identified.
2. Y Ushadevi and V N Jayachandran (2001) a project of Kerala research programme on local level development (krplld) center for research studies Thiruvanthapuram. Socio-economic

profile of rubber tappers in the small holding sector. The study basically focused on the tapper's workers. The study found that tapper work is not an easy work as it requires skill and is labour intensive for the good health of the rubber tree and maintaining the longevity of its production period.

3. A comparative study of the informal conditions of the plantation labourers of India labourer of India and Sri Lankan. By Neelam Choudhary and Deeksha Tayal. The study focuses on the section of plantation labourers, who are directly employed by the employer are contract workers. The study also suggest the effectiveness of any formalization strategy would require collective involvement and social dialogue among all the key players in the plantation sector.
4. Government of India (1980) Labour Bureau Ministry of Labour Socio-economic condition of women workers in plantation action. In this study focused on the plantation sectors of the labour's economical life.
5. Reenomol Joseph in her dissertation titled "A case study on social-economic conditions of Tea plantation workers at Ellaparah Panchayath" in 2018 highlights that workers are paid very less wages and their living conditions can improve when Government and associations help them in education and better working conditions

### Objectives of the study:

1. To understand the working conditions of coffee plantation workers.
2. To identify problems faced by the workers and give recommendations

### Research design:

The research design of this study is descriptive in nature. This study helps in understanding and profiling the socio-economic conditions of the plantation workers so as to ensure relevant policies and subsidies are implemented and workers become aware of them

Descriptive research involves includes survey and fact finding.

### Sampling:

Simple random sampling is the process of drawing a sample from a population in such a way that each and every unit or item of the population has the equal chance of being included in the sample.

Two stages of sampling design were adopted for the survey. In the first stage of sampling, the sample size of the unit level or employer level schedule has been determined.

In the second stages, sample worker level schedule have been designed

- **SAMPLE UNITS**

Three coffee units had permitted the researcher to interact with their employees and as such these three numbers of firms forms the sample units for the study.

- **SAMPLE SIZE**

The sample size includes workers belonging from the three units of the plantation

**QUESTIONNAIRES:**

Two specially designed schedules were used for the purpose of this survey.

- (1) The unit level questionnaire was used to capture the working condition of workers. A unit level questionnaire was designed to collect data for the unit as a whole on important parameters ,like year of establishment, types of ownership, mode of payment wages and earning of the manual workers, leave and holidays, daily hour of work, gender-wise employment of workers in the plantation, trade union, welfare amenities available to workers, social security benefit.
  
- (ii) The worker level schedule is designed to collect the data on living condition of workers employed in the plantation. The schedule was designed to capture the important aspects like migration, status caste, demographic particular (age profile, marital status, education qualification etc.), Wages and earning total income and savings, in-debttness, medical expenditure etc.

**DATA COLLECTION**

Data has been collected both by Primary and Secondary sources.

*Primary data:* Primary data has been collected through a structured, unbiased and non-disguised questionnaire which consisted of field survey all the workers from different firm gave their relevant information during the survey.

*Secondary data:* Secondary data has been collected through books, websites and journals based on the relevant topics of the research work.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In course of conducting the survey the researcher faced difficulty in establishing communication linkage with the workers because most of the tribal workers in interior areas are not fluent in any language other than their mother tongue.

**Data Analysis:****Age wise classification of respondents:**

Table No-1

Age	Respondents	%age
18-20	3	1.00%
20-25	72	25.00%
25-30	17	6.00%
30-35	26	9.00%
35-40	132	46.00%
40-45	20	7.00%
45-50	11	4.00%
> 50	6	2.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents between ages 35-40 are majority of workers and respondents between ages 18-20 are the least comparatively with the rest of the correspondents/population referred above.

Table No 2

Gender	Respondents	%age
Male	45	15.00%
Female	241	85.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that the majority of the correspondents who work are Female with 85.00% of the total respondents and only 15.00% for the Male. This study also reiterates that women workers are majority in plantations industry. Many facilities are to be arranged for the women workers like transport, toilets, and rest rooms so as to make it convenient to work.

Table No 3

Marital Status	Respondents	%age
Unmarried	57	20.00%
Married	229	80.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that most of the respondents who work are married with a percentage of 80.00% and the rest are unmarried with a total of 57 respondents and with a percentage of 20.00%

Table No-4

<b>Mother Tongue</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Kannada	227	<b>79.00%</b>
Tamil	14	<b>5.00%</b>
Urdu/Hindi	14	<b>5.00%</b>
Others	31	<b>10.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents with mother tongue Kannada is popular among the workers and the rest respondents with mother tongue Tamil and Urdu/Hindi are also there. There are few migrant workers with mother tongue of other languages also like Bhojpuri, Rajasthani etc

Table No 5

<b>Category</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
SC	243	<b>85.00%</b>
ST	11	<b>4.00%</b>
OBC	23	<b>8.00%</b>
Religious Minority	6	<b>2.00%</b>
GC	3	<b>1.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that majority of the respondents who work belong to SC category with a total of 243 and with 85.00% and other categories like ST,OBC and GC have a total of 11, 23, 6 and 3 with percentages 4.00% ,8.00% , 2.00%and 1.00% respectively.

Table No 6

<b>Type of Family</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Nuclear	260	<b>91.00%</b>
Joint	11	<b>4.00%</b>
Extended	14	<b>5.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From above table we can analyze that respondents who work more belong to nuclear family with a population of 91.00% and joint, extended with 4.00% and 5.00% respectively. It is an observation that even in rural areas joint family has disintegrated and nuclear families have become very common.

Table No 7

<b>How did you get the job in the Plantation</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Self-Enquiries	243	<b>85.00%</b>
Agents	43	<b>15.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that majority of the respondents who work here got the job based on self-enquiries with 243 respondents and with 85.00% and the rest 15.0% i.e., 43 respondents got the job through agents. Agents do play a dual role in collecting commissions from both plantation growers and workers also.

Table No 8

<b>Frequency of Visit Native Place</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Non-seasonal time	180	<b>62.00%</b>
Nearby villages	106	<b>38.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The above tables illustrates, that some of migrant workers tend to visit their natives during the non-seasonal times. And 38% of workers come from nearby villages and their visit their natives more frequently.

Table No 9

<b>Nature of Migration</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Individual	263	<b>92.00%</b>
With family	23	<b>8.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that nature of migration is more among individual respondents rather than the respondents with their families with total of 263 and 23 with 92.00% and 8.00% respectively.

Since the wages are much lower and majority workers are women they individually work in the plantation and ten to go back to their villages using the company based transport. Only few migrants from far like Tamil Nadu, Telengana tend to bring their families.



Table No 10

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Daily Wage in Plantation	263	<b>92.00%</b>
Supervisor	23	<b>8.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From above table we can analyze that respondents with daily wage plantation are more with respective supervisor and also as number of daily wage in plantation is more in medium, supervisor is more when compare to the rest with the 92.00% in total of daily wage in plantation and with 8.00% supervisor respectively.

Table No 11

<b>Nature of employment</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
	<b>Small Acreage</b>	<b>%age</b>
Permanent	43	<b>15.00%</b>
Temporary	243	<b>85.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that nature of respondents who are temporary are more when compared to permanent with a count of 243 and 43 respondents and 15.00% and 85.00% respectively. Workers ten to work in other plantation and agriculture fields during off season's time.

Table No 12

<b>Supplementary Occupation</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Construction Work in Town	23	<b>8.00%</b>
Agriculture Work, other farms like spices, arcanet etc	255	<b>89.00%</b>
Others	9	<b>3.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents with supplementary occupation of agriculture work is more when compared with the rest with a highest of 255 correspondents and with 89.00 %respectively. Some workers tend to do construction work in MGNREGS projects for a brief time.

Table No 13

Wage rate	Respondents	%age
< than 250/-	65	22%
Rs. 251/- to 300/-	103	37%
Rs. 301 to 350/-	76	27%
Rs. 350 & above	42	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table No 14

Satisfaction towards working conditions	Respondents	%age
Satisfied	86	30.00%
Undecided	29	10.00%
Unsatisfied	172	60.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The majority of workers have responded in the negative regarding satisfaction towards working conditions, it is a great concern for the plantation growers, government policies. 60% of respondents are having grievances and problems at the work place and only 30% of them feel safe and satisfied.

Table No 15

Reasons for dissatisfaction towards working conditions	Respondents	%age
Job security	198	69%
Wages/salary	256	89%
Safety at work	239	83%
Benefits	204	71%
Lack of leave/break	246	86%
Hours of work (high)	258	90%
Others	237	82%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	

The above table depicts the reasons for dis-satisfaction among workers which is multiple. Majority of workers have an opinion that their wages and salaries should be hiked and it is not sufficient to sustain the growing prices of essential commodities for a living. Another major reason identified

is there are long working hours and there is hardly break for personal and social activities which is strenuous for the workers in the long run. Since there is an amount of dominations from managers and supervisors, worker feel unsafe during work. And since majority are women workers safety at work should be given priority.

They feel large company plantations workers are more safe and given better facilities then small plantation workers.

**Table No 16**

<b>Working Hours in a Day</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>%age</b>
8 Hours	72	<b>25.00%</b>
10 Hours	83	<b>29.00%</b>
12 Hours	120	<b>42.00%</b>
12 Hours and Above	11	<b>4.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that the respondents work for 12 hours in a day excluding the transport time, which they feel is an importance inconvenience. 29% of them work for ten hours. According to Plantation Labour Act 1951, the maximum hours of work is 9 hours per day or 54 hours in a week. These plantation industry is exploiting the workers with extra hours of work without paying the premium wages also.

Table No 17

<b>Do you feel any discrimination at work place.</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
	<b>Small Acreage</b>	<b>%age</b>
Yes	183	<b>64.00%</b>
No	103	<b>36.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that 64% of respondents feel discrimination at workplace which is a great concern. Discrimination comes from language, affinity, service (age) etc.

Workers feel it is unfair to pay differential wages based on this discrimination.

Table No 18

<b>Nature of Payment</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
	<b>Small Acreage</b>	<b>%age</b>
Daily	26	<b>9.00%</b>
Weekly	255	<b>89.00%</b>
Monthly	6	<b>2.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents who take daily wages payments are more when compared with weekly and monthly payments with highest of 89.00% in daily wage payment with 225 respondents, though the calculation of wages are done daily it is disbursed on a weekly bases to all workers.

**Table No 19**

<b>Monthly Income of the House Hold</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
1000 to 4999	57	<b>20.00%</b>
5000 to 9999	186	<b>65.00%</b>
10000 to 14999	43	<b>15.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents whose monthly income of household is between 5000 to 9999 are more when compared with the rest monthly income like 1000 to 4999 and 10000 to 14999 with covering about 65.00% of the total respondents.

In young families, two both husband and wife works and pool the household income to Rs.10,000/- on an average.

**Table No 20**

<b>Whether wages are paid on time:</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Yes	212	<b>74.00%</b>
No	74	<b>26.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents YES are more with respective to respondents who say NO with respect to wages paid in time are not.

**Table No 21**

<b>Overtime wages if any:</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
	<b>Small Acreage</b>	<b>%age</b>
Yes	100	<b>34%</b>
No	186	<b>65%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents less than 50% of respondents get overtime work and wages. It is during the seasonal time, when extra people are not recruited, overtime of one hour is given for few workers. But majority of them do not get the opportunity of overtime.

**Table No 22**

<b>Do you get weekly off with wages</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Yes	212	<b>74.00%</b>
No	74	<b>24.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the above table we can analyze that respondents say yes are more with respective to the respondents who say No for the weekly holidays. Some of them tend to work extra on Sunday also to earn more and they do not get the weekly off generally, In small plantations, but in large organizational plantations weekly off is compulsory

**Table No 23**

<b>Are you satisfied with the wage</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
		<b>%age</b>
Yes	17	<b>6.00%</b>
No	269	<b>94.00%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**The above table depicts that respondents are not satisfied with the wages they receive. They are of the opinion that cost of education, medical and general cost of living has increased and their wages have not increased to the required level.**

### **Findings and conclusions:**

1. 46% of the respondents were of the age group of 35 to 40 years.
2. 86 % of workers were females, clearly indicated that in the un organized sector women play a very important role in generating revenues and income of the family.
3. Schedule caste and OBC category formed the majority of plantation workers
4. 85% of the workers got their jobs through acquaintances and self-enquiries
5. Most of the workers are settled or have homes in nearby villages and they use local transport to reach they work place
6. Majority of workers are working on daily wages but the wages is given on weekly basis. Most of them work on temporary basis
7. The average rate of daily wages is Rs. 300 to 350/- per day

8. Majority of the workers in the small plantations are not happy about the working conditions. Some of the major reasons they highlight is the low wages, lack of leaves and long working hours during seasonal work.
9. 72% of respondents felt that the working hours are long, though The Plantation Labour Act indicates the maximum of 9 hours during a day, and an extension calls for extra payment. No plantation owner follows this. It is compulsory to work for 10 to 12 hours for a day's work.
10. Majority of the workers feel there is discrimination among the supervisors. There is no system of complaining or redressal of awareness of their rights against these discriminations.
11. There are sometimes delay in the payment of wages also which is difficult to manage by the workers. ‘
12. It was surprising to know that some of the plantations workers work for 7 days without an holiday during the peak season to increase their earnings.
13. Majority of the workers are not satisfied with their wages as they are not able to make both the ends meet, with raising prices their sustenance is becoming difficulty is their opinion.

### Recommendations:

- The Plantation Labour Act has to be enforced thereby ensuring minimum facilities like compulsory rest of 7<sup>th</sup> day, payment on time, basic facilities like drinking water, toilets facilities in the plantation area to be provided as many workers are women.
- Karnataka planters are not happy with the consistent increase in labor cost as it makes up 60 % of the total cost of coffee cultivation. But with high inflation workers are demanding higher wages since there is no substitute to their earnings.
- Another important findings in this study is the workplace discriminations which is reported. There should be a procedure in which the workers can put forth their complaints and there should be a redressal procedures also. An awareness program can be conducted about the rights of the workers in case of discrimination.
- An education session and increased awareness would help the workers to be more conscious and improve their socio-economic conditions.

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