

A Study On Rice Mill Workers Living Condition In Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Rice mill workers often endure challenging living and working conditions, characterized by low wages, inadequate housing, and exposure to hazardous environments. Many workers live in overcrowded, temporary accommodations with limited access to basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation. The working environment poses health risks, including respiratory issues from rice husk dust, noise-induced hearing problems, and heat stress from prolonged exposure to machinery. These conditions are exacerbated by long working hours, lack of protective equipment, and insufficient access to healthcare. Besides, economic instability and social marginalization limit workers' opportunities for education and upward mobility. In some cases, child labor persists, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Addressing these challenges requires policy reforms to enforce labor rights, improve wages, and ensure workplace safety. Additionally, community development initiatives such as affordable housing, healthcare access, and education programs are essential to enhance the quality of life for rice mill workers and their families. This study made an attempt to bring the exact situation among the rice mill workers Living Conditions in Madurai District

Key words: Rice mill, Living Condition. Education, Socio Economic, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Rice mill workers in India play a crucial role in the agricultural and food processing sectors. Their livelihoods are closely tied to the rice milling industry, which is an integral part of the country's economy. Here are some key aspects of rice mill workers' livelihood in India: Employment Opportunities: The rice milling industry provides employment to a significant number of workers across the country. This industry encompasses a wide range of job roles, including mill operators, machine technicians, supervisors, and manual laborers. Income Source: For many workers, employment in rice mills is their primary source of income. These jobs provide a steady income, especially in regions where rice cultivation is prevalent. Seasonal Employment: In some cases, rice mill work may be seasonal, closely linked to the rice harvesting season. Workers may find employment during peak harvest times and then experience downtime during the rest of the year. Variety of Roles: The rice milling industry offers diverse job opportunities. Workers may be involved in tasks such as milling, sorting, packaging, maintenance of machinery, and quality control. Urban and Rural Employment: Rice mills can be found in both urban and rural areas, providing employment opportunities to people living in various regions of the country. In rural areas, rice mills often serve as important sources of employment and economic activity. Work Conditions: The working conditions in rice mills can vary. Some workers may have to deal with dusty environments, especially during the milling process. Health and safety concerns are important, and addressing them is essential for the well-being of the workers. Economic Impact: The rice milling industry has a significant economic impact on the livelihoods of workers and their communities. Many rice mill workers are part of a larger supply chain that contributes to the availability of rice for domestic consumption and export. Training and Skill Development: For workers in the rice milling industry, opportunities for training and skill development are essential. Training programs can help improve job skills and safety awareness. Challenges: The rice milling industry, like many other sectors, faces challenges such as fluctuating market prices, technological changes, and competition. These challenges can impact the job security and livelihoods of rice mill workers.

Rice mill Workers in India

The majority of India's laborers in rice mills are in favor of the country's economic growth and food security. Their means of survival are closely related to the rice milling industry, which is constantly evolving as a result of changes in consumer tastes and developments in technology. These individuals need a reliable and secure location to work, and both rural and urban places must provide it.

Housing: The living conditions of rice mill workers might range from basic, compact apartments to more luxurious residences, depending on the company's policies and their financial status. There are situations in which rice mill owners may house their staff members.

Sanitation and Hygiene: There are differences in the availability of suitable sanitation facilities, pure drinking water, and hygienic circumstances. Workers occasionally may experience issues with hygiene and cleanliness, particularly if they reside in crowded, informal communities or rural locations.

Healthcare: It might be difficult to get access to healthcare services, particularly in rural locations. Employees might be dependent on nearby healthcare professionals, and they might not have unrestricted access to medical facilities.

Income and Wages: Workers at rice mills may earn a wide range of salaries. Many workers may have small incomes, and wages may be on the lower end. Ensuring equitable compensation and prompt payment is a crucial concern.

Working Hours: During the busiest rice milling season, employees frequently put in lengthy hours. The demands of their jobs may have an impact on their living conditions.

Safety: Risks associated with the use of powerful machinery and dust exposure can make working in rice mills at times dangerous. To safeguard employees, safety precautions are essential.

Community and Social Factors: The local community and social dynamics can have an impact on the living conditions of workers in rice mills. Social services, community connections, and support networks all contribute to employees' well-being.

Government Policies and Regulations: To safeguard workers' rights and provide equitable working conditions, the Tamil Nadu government, like other state governments in India, has put policies and regulations in place. Living conditions may be impacted by these regulations.

It's crucial to remember that living conditions for Tamil Nadu's rice mill laborers can vary greatly, and that each worker's situation may be very different. Furthermore, labor unions and non-governmental organizations frequently seek to enhance the general well-being and living conditions of state laborers, including those employed in rice mills.

Objectives of the study

1. To know the Living condition and Livelihood Problems of Rice Mill Workers in Madurai District
- ### **Socio Economic Conditions of the Rice Mill Workers**

The socio-economic conditions of rice mill industry workers can vary widely depending on factors such as location, scale of operation, government policies, and the specific circumstances of individual workers. However, there are some common themes and challenges that are often associated with the socio-economic conditions of rice mill industry workers in India and other rice-producing countries:

1. **Income and Wages:** Many rice mill workers, especially in smaller, traditional mills, earn modest incomes. Wages may be on the lower side, and economic insecurity can be a common issue. Workers may struggle to make ends meet, especially during the off-season when work is limited.
2. **Working Conditions:** Rice mill workers often work long hours, especially during the peak milling season. The working conditions can be physically demanding, and workers may face health and safety risks due to exposure to dust, heavy machinery, and manual labor.
3. **Housing and Living Conditions:** Housing conditions can range from basic accommodations to more comfortable living arrangements, depending on the employer's policies and the workers' economic circumstances. In some cases, workers may live in quarters provided by the rice mill owners.

4. **Healthcare:** Access to healthcare services can be limited, especially in rural areas. Workers may rely on local healthcare providers, and their access to medical facilities may be restricted.
5. **Education:** Access to quality education for the children of rice mill workers can be a challenge, particularly in rural areas. The socio-economic status of the workers can affect their ability to invest in their children's education.
6. **Social and Community Ties:** The socio-economic conditions of rice mill workers are influenced by the social and community dynamics in the specific area. Support systems and community ties can play a role in their well-being.
7. **Labor Rights and Regulation:** The extent to which labor rights are protected and enforced can significantly impact the socio-economic conditions of rice mill workers. Government regulations, labor unions, and advocacy organizations play a role in safeguarding workers' rights.
8. **Seasonal Employment:** For some rice mill workers, employment may be seasonal, closely tied to the rice harvesting and milling seasons. This can lead to economic challenges during the off-season.
9. **Economic Vulnerability:** Many rice mill workers may face economic vulnerability due to fluctuations in market prices, seasonal employment, and limited job opportunities in their areas.
10. **Government Policies:** Government policies related to labor rights, minimum wages, and social welfare programs can have a significant impact on the socio-economic conditions of rice mill workers.

Improving the socio-economic conditions of rice mill industry workers often requires efforts to enhance wages, promote workplace safety, provide access to healthcare and education, and address the economic vulnerabilities associated with seasonal employment. Labor unions and advocacy organizations often play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and well-being of these workers. Additionally, government initiatives and policies aimed at improving the livelihoods of agricultural and industrial laborers can make a difference in the socio-economic conditions of rice mill workers.

Problems of Rice Mill Workers

The worker's problems are the socio-economic term widely used toward the turn of the twentieth century with various applications. It has been defined in many ways, such as "the problem of improving the conditions of employment of the wage-earning classes." It encompasses the difficulties faced by wage-earners and employers who began to cut wages for various reasons including increased technology, desire for lower costs or to stay in business. The wage-earning classes responded with strikes, by unionizing and by committing acts of outright violence. It was a nationwide problem that spanned nearly all industries and helped contribute to modern business conditions still seen today. Possible causes include the failure to account for the negative externality of reproduction in the face of finite natural resources which results in over-supply of labor and falling living standards for wage-laborers, depersonalization by machines and poor working conditions. The path taken in this research is traced in this chapter. Every organization should determine whether the workers working are satisfied with the facility provided by the organization. workers to know about their work was studied through an interview schedule observed after taking a purposive sampling method sample. The importance of worker's element in the process of its smooth functioning and its goal attainment has led to the belief that the main task of the workers is to bring about a co-ordination of all human efforts. The workforce is the workers pool in employment. It is generally used to describe those working for a single company or industry, but can also apply to a geographic region like a city, county, state, etc. The term generally excludes the employers or management, and implies those involved in manual workers. It may also mean all those that are available for work. Workers may be unionized, whereby the union conducts negotiations regarding pay and conditions of employment. In the event of industrial unrest, unions provide a co-ordinating role in organizing ballots of the workforce and strike action. Rice mill is an organization of workers who have banded together to achieve common goals in key areas such as wages, hours, and working conditions. The trade union, through its leadership, bargains with the employer on behalf of union members.

This may include the negotiation of wages, work rules, complaint procedures, rules governing hiring, firing and promotion of workers, benefits, workplace safety and policies.

Brief Situation of Bonded Labour in Rice Mills

There are nearly 10,000 bonded labourers (many of them illiterate Irula tribal families) in the paddy processing units of rice mills in Redhills. The living conditions in many mills lack the basic amenities of drinking water, light, toilets, and bathrooms. Children are made to work to repay the debt incurred by parents. Debts start from Rs 100-300, multiplying to Rs. 50,000 over generations. There are no childcare and safety measures, leading to fatal accidents. The work of cleaning the paddy, boiling it in boilers, drying the wet paddy, packing and carrying is done by adult workers. The children do cleaning work and assist the parents in drying paddy. No child is allowed to go to school. They work from 11pm till 6pm on the next day, and hardly get any sleep. Wages are paid every four days, at the rate of Rs.8 per bag, roughly as Rs.240 for four persons for 4 days. This works out to Rs.15 for 19 hours of hard labour, which is in violation of the minimum wages fixed by the State Govt. Labour Dept. for rice mill workers (Rs.84 for 8 hours of work). Marriages and deliveries take place inside the work premise. When a worker dies, the funeral can take place only after the work is over at 6 pm. Incidents of physical beating, locking them up, sexual harassments of women workers occur frequently. Sarpam Irular Thozhilalar Sangam, an association of tribal workers with its headquarters in Thiruvallur did a survey of the conditions of bonded labourers in Redhills in 2009-2012. Since then, it has been making contacts with the bonded labourers and sensitizing them on ways to improve their condition. Since July, bonded laborers from 25 rice mills have been visiting the Sarpam office with complaints.

The District wise area, production & productivity of rice for the year 2019-20 is shown in the table below:

District	Area	Production	Yield
Ariyalur	23,224	89,656	3.86
Coimbatore	861	3,219	3.74
Cuddalore	1,32,151	4,95,309	3.75
Dharmapuri	15,812	67,791	4.29
Dindigul	8,140	36,936	4.54
Erode	34,567	1,57,592	4.56
Kanchipuram	87,329	4,33,336	4.96
Kanniyakumari	10,970	43,804	3.99
Karur	11,130	38,997	3.50
Krishnagiri	23,568	1,10,688	4.70
Madurai	40,468	1,65,916	4.10
Nagapattinam	1,69,222	5,58,609	3.30
Namakkal	10,553	47,734	4.52
Perambalur	6,162	26,988	4.38
Pudukkottai	87,809	2,73,188	3.11
Ramanathapuram	1,27,288	3,21,481	2.53
Salem	19,590	84,593	4.32
Sivaganga	70,371	1,88,316	2.68
Thanjavur	1,92,231	7,15,112	3.72
The Nilgiris	170	698	4.11
Theni	8,930	36,668	4.11
Thiruvallur	96,609	4,19,727	4.34
Thiruvarur	180,900	6,59,279	3.64
Thoothukudi	15,519	57,507	3.71

Tiruchirappalli	49,623	2,10,142	4.23
Tirunelveli	79,209	3,15,368	3.98
Tiruppur	9,849	47,760	4.85
Tiruvannamalai	1,61,679	6,89,469	4.26
Vellore	45,569	2,04,614	4.49
Villupuram	1,63,293	6,81,883	4.18
Virudhunagar	24,492	82,781	3.38
Total – Rice	19,07,407	72,65,161	3.81

CONCLUSION

Rice mill workers are essential to the functioning of every mill. A well-dressed, well-fed, and satisfied worker is a significant asset to any business. Therefore, mill owners should prioritize the development of the workers involved in their operations. It is widely recognized that a large number of both male and female workers are employed in mills, and rice mills are no exception. Workers represent a substantial segment of the Indian population, playing a critical role in the development of the Indian economy. Their contributions to society cannot be overstated; they are the pillars of their families and hold the key to providing for them. Many of these workers dedicate their valuable time to supporting their siblings and taking care of their households. Men and women work in rice mills to sustain their families, which requires fair and sustainable earnings. To improve their welfare, mill owners should ensure a conducive working environment, healthy industrial relations, and various welfare facilities. The absence of these elements can hinder positive relationships within the mills, demotivate workers, create job dissatisfaction, and lead to higher levels of labor turnover and absenteeism. Undoubtedly, improving the socio-economic conditions of the workers can act as a motivating factor, fostering positive relationships within the mills. In this context, an effort has been made to investigate the socio-economic conditions of workers engaged in selected rice mills in the Madurai district.

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