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## SOCIOECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THE ELDERLY DAILY-WAGE WORKERS: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW ON COVID19 PANDEMIC AND NEW NORMALS

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### Abstract:

*The preventive measures taken during COVID-19 pandemic in the form of janata curfew, lockdowns, inter or intra state movement restrictions has adversely affected the income and earning means of the elderly daily-wage workers engaging themselves in different kinds of works, specifically in manual works. The empirical evidence shows that, due to temporary cessation of employment and other activities the elderly daily wagers experience hardship to manage the situation. Most of the labourers are migrant workers hailing from distant places across the country; hence many of them stayed back at their working places. Eventually, they face problems of providing financial support to their family members and they themselves too face severe financial problems in managing themselves at their working places. This paper aims to understand the economic challenges and social maladjustments faced by elderly labourers during lockdown days. Data were collected through Open-ended interviews from 30 elderly labourers from different parts of Itanagar Capital Region in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, besides outsourcing available secondary resources. Out of the total sample, 40% of respondents were found comfortable at workplaces due to their durable staying since long past, while 60% were uncomfortable due to the reason that they had come to earn breads for their dependents just for short duration. However, they altogether similarly experience financial crunch as well as social maladjustments. Elderly plays a pivotal role in shaping and re-shaping of society contributing the efficient and productive pattern of socialization in human generations. They must be immensely valued even at the workplace in prioritize and dignified manners.*

**Keywords:** Economic, Elderly, Lockdown, Wage, Workplace

### Introduction:

COVID-related developments, including government-imposed movement restrictions and the associated constraints on non essential businesses, have reduced overall economic activities that had a particular impact on vulnerable groups, including daily-wage workers, and their living conditions. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank in April 2020, 90% of employers reported that cash-flow reductions were preventing their businesses from returning to normal following an easing of lockdown restrictions (UNHCR, March 2021). Over the last two years the

human society has been gone through an unprecedented grim of tragedy. The novel corona virus or COVID-19 pandemic virtually engulfs the whole world in rapid pace. With the outbreaking of the virus the authorities promptly swung into actions take steps to contain rapid spreading of the deadly virus. The some of the popular preventive measures taken during COVID-19 pandemic were imposition of public curfew, complete or partial lockdowns of civilian movement and travel restrictions. Considering the severity of the situations, different state government had adopted different measures to control the further spreading of the virus depending on the prevailing situations and emerging realities. Except the exempted ones, there has been a complete restriction on plying of public transportations like buses, trains, chopper, and airplane services for certain duration. With this, mass populous have to be suffered with numerous untold human miseries ranging from livelihood maintenance to emotional well-being. In certain occasion, even some have been subject to a social discrimination leading to hear lots about disturbing news. Since the imposition of lockdown, especially the daily wagers faced severe crisis of employment opportunities in local labour markets. The Wire (on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021) was reported that, during the COVID-19 crisis periods, getting work for even two days a week was very difficult. The marginalized sections of society particularly the elderly, widows, orphans and all those living below poverty line are among those who were greatly suffered throughout this trial times. It has adversely affected the income and earning means of the elderly daily-wage workers engaging themselves in different kinds of works, specifically in manual works. With the interaction of the respondents, it came to know that, due to temporary cessation of employment and other activities the elderly daily wagers have experienced hardship in managing their personal affairs. They face problems of providing financial support to their family members and to managing themselves at their working places. In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, most of the manual labours are from outside the state working as migrant workers. While some of them are residing in the state for last many years, many are just coming for wages earning. They make earnings through daily wages, small contract works and also by other contractual engagements.

### **Objectives:**

The present study attempts to understand the socioeconomic challenges and other related constraints faced by elderly daily wage workers engaged in manual works in the Itanagar Capital Region during lockdowns.

### **Materials and Methods:**

The study was done on 30 (thirty) elderly respondents with 10 (ten) each from Itanagar, Naharlagun and Nirjuli areas respectively. Primary data were collected through face to face interaction by employing the open-ended interview method. For the purpose of the present study, the elderly are considered from the age 50 Years and is divided into 3 (three) different age groups as

shown in table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Age-wise classification of respondents**

Age Group (in Years)	No. of respondents taken from the universe						Cumulative Figures		
	Itanagar Areas		Naharlagun Areas		Nirjuli Areas				
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
50 – 55	02	01	03	02	03	02	08	05	<b>13</b>
56 – 60	03	02	02	01	02	01	07	04	<b>11</b>
60 Above	02	00	02	00	02	00	06	00	<b>06</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>30</b>

Out of the total 30 (thirty) respondents 70 percent (21 persons) constitutes male, while female constitutes 30 percent (09 persons). Among the 3 (three) different age groups, the highest number of respondents (13) are the age group of 50-55 years which constitutes 49 percent, while the lowest 20 percent (06) belong to age 60 above.

#### **Review of the Literature:**

Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti et al. (2021) observed that the lockdown period witnessed a severe fall in the standard of living of the working, who, as a result of shutting down of the production and services in the cities and the industrial centers the migrants lost employment. Likewise, the daily wage workers (including the elderly) working in and around the Itanagar capital region have also lost their daily-earning opportunities and in some cases they have lost the job due to closing of the shop or business establishments. Without leaving any other alternatives to sustain their earnings, they compelled themselves to live without earning wages.

Hans, Ana et al (2021) in their study have categorically observed that the migrant labour crisis in India triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown was a window that vividly illustrated India's unequal political economy, precarious social ecology and deepening faultiness.. It happens due to the fact that, in some ways the policies does not render as much as commendable because faultiness were observed in the part of programme implementations.

ILO-OECD paper (2021) highlighted that with spreading of the corona virus around the world workplaces were closed leading millions of workers lost their job. With the temporal closure of private entities and establishments thousands of job holders face severe financial crunch due to discontinuation of salary payment. Apart from that, they (job holders) were also facing discontentment with the controlling bosses.

Ahmad et al (2020) in their research article titled "India's response to the COVID 19 pandemic and its impact on migrant workers: a public health perspective" stated that the blockade and the global COVID-19 pandemic has caused the destruction of millions of workers' lives. Migrant workers face grim situations in accessing different resources and benefits provided by the concerned state government. Due to their migrant status, they could not avail the services as desired.

Das and Patnaik (2020) in their research study noted that the current pandemic situation has a profound and negative impact on Indian companies. They opined that, the impact of the pandemic could cause a slowdown in domestic demand.

Nicola et al (2020) cautiously noted that Social distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions measures adopted by government have lead to a reduced workforce across all economic sectors and caused loss of jobs to many. As a result, many daily wage workers, including the elderly persons have render helpless due to reducing income or earning and finally running out of money.

Shahare et al (2020) in their study mentioned that the Corona virus pandemic have a serious impact on the living conditions of the people who belong to the daily wage society. It threw lights on the degrading standard of the people living in a poverty condition.

Shanmughasundaram (2020) states that people who depend on daily or weekly wages have not only lost their livelihoods, but are also struggling to make ends meet. According to him, the daily wage workers besides lost their daily living costs, they also were struggling to provide supports to their family dependents. Due to this reason, they lived in a distress situation and mentally disturbed for some times as well.

UN Policy Brief (2020) revealed that the virus is not just threatening the lives and safety of older persons, but also threatening their social networks, their access to health services, their jobs and their pensions. The older persons being a physically fragile with the demeaning health conditions obviously face difficulties to manage all their affairs. They could not properly handle the situations through digital mediums like work from home or by any online digital modes. Due to their inability to handle, sometimes, they are subject to humiliation and ill treated from the controlling bodies.

### **Findings and Discussion:**

Out of the total sample, 40% of respondents were found to be comfortable at their respective work places due to their durable staying since long past, while 60% were uncomfortable due to migrating just for short duration. However, they altogether similarly experience financial crunches so long the complete lockdowns were put in place. Those staying comfortably are those who have been in their workplaces since last many years, like some are working here since the last two or three decades. For them, they can easily manage themselves according to the circumstances. Owe to their long period of association with the local communities some of them are even very acquainted with tribal cultures and value system. Hence, even during the lockdown times they did not have the

feelings of insecurity. But on the other hand, those labourers who just came for working for short duration find themselves uncomfortable and insecure. The study has found that uncomfortable feelings are mostly observed among the daily wage labourers of the age group of 50-55, whereas the age 60 above are highly comfortable in their respective place of staying. The reason is that, many of migrant workers usually don't have own accommodations. They are either staying at the attached structure in the works site or temporarily staying with their relative and known persons. So, they faced difficulties in adjustment with the circumstances.

**Table 1.2: Assessment of Living Condition at their working places**

Age Group (in Years)	No. of respondents taken from the universe					
	Itanagar Areas (in persons)		Naharlagun Areas (in persons)		Nirjuli Areas (in persons)	
	Comfortable	Uncomfortable	Comfortable	Uncomfortable	Comfortable	Uncomfortable
50 – 55	00	07	00	03	01	03
56 – 60	01	00	02	03	01	03
60 Above	02	00	02	00	03	00
<b>Total</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>06</b>
No. & percentage of respondents: <b>Comfortable</b> = 12 (40%) and <b>Uncomfortable</b> = 18 (60%)						

**Economic Challenges:**

- (1) **Income:** Since the wages received from their hard workings is the main source of income, the elderly wage labourers face grim situations not only to himself or herself but also impact on their family dependents. With the lockdowns being imposed across the length and breadth of the country, their daily-basis income was reduced and many people become jobless. This brought a severe impact in their banking services also. Those who have a fixed deposit or insurance accounts they could not pay on time resulting to pending liabilities towards their account maturity.
- (2) **Family Support:** Almost all the daily wage workers are breadwinners for their family and even for the extended family members too. Getting works on daily basis is the main sources of their livelihood. They made income and maintain their family from wages. They extend financial support to their family for purchasing of goods, commodities and consumable items and pay fees for their wards in the school or others. However, with the nationwide imposition of lockdowns all works through which they used to earn money on daily-wages basis stopped working. As a result,

they could not earn money or wages that creates hurdles to overcome the financial crunches face in their family. Dependents living at their own home do not receive financial supports on time.

- (3) **Accommodation:** The study found that almost all daily wage workers (including the elderly) are residing in rental accommodation. Some are staying in rent house/rooms, some are in a land plot on tenancy-basis, while others are either staying in attached structure at work site or staying with relatives or friends. Lockdowns has deeply impacted to those staying in rental accommodation, because they could not pay rent fee on time due to reduced or least income during that entire lockdown period. Besides that, they also face difficulties to afford for consumables due to skyrocketing rise of commodity prices.

### **Social Maladjustments:**

- (1) **Cultural Difference:** cultural values are characterized by some form of identity like language, tones, appearance, food habits and occupational practices. It becomes barriers for many people wherever one goes or settles down in terms of adaptability and adjustability. The migrant workers come from different parts of the country lived in the midst of indigenous local community who are very different in many terms. They have distinct culture and identities of their own which in turn, differ from the tribal ways of life and livelihood. During the lockdown period, the daily wagers face difficulties in interaction with the local people due to fear of restraints. The study found that these migrant workers only because of being an outsiders they faced troubles and challenges affecting them psychologically.
- (2) **Adaptability:** With the objectives of mitigating the colossal loss of life and severity of the situation the COVID-19 appropriate norms have been put in place for strict compliance. However, till voluntary realization, it was very difficult for everyone to adapt the new norms in their daily life. So, adaptability with the prevailing situation develops another pattern of lifestyles. Social distancing norms remain to be a one effective way of preventive measures but at the same time it becomes discriminatory in nature. In the pretext of maintaining social distancing norms, some had used it as a means of harassing or discriminating others which is very detrimental in itself. For the migrant wage workers who stays back, otherwise who could not go their home on time were facing problems of adapting the social environment of the frontier state. There are different pattern of food habits, occupational structure and maintaining the life and livelihood on daily basis. In case of tribal society, they are not merely depending on exporting items or commodities supplied from external sources. But, can be easily survived by access foods from forest based occupations like agriculture, horticulture etc. So, even at the trial times they could have remained unaffected. But on the other hand, the outsiders' migrant workers could not adapt as their tribal counterparts did, leading to shoulder financial burden over the times particularly in consumption.

## Conclusion:

Elderly plays a pivotal role in shaping and re-shaping of society contributing it by ways of socialization and guiding the young generations. They are not only the protectors of their families and dependants, but most importantly the treasured of indigenous knowledge system (IKS), by which the entire social milieu and different domains of life were carefully fostered, protected and preserved for the sake of humanity. They have invested all their energies, abilities, efficiencies and capacities in strengthening the cultural values of the society. However, at the time, when their physical efficiency becomes weak and dwindling day by day, the society in some way or the others overlooked their contributions to the society. In many occasion, they were marginalized owing to physical fragility and deficiencies. Elderly people face such discouraging situations at their workplaces too because of the perspective of the young people. Such attitude of young generation people towards the ageing veterans is disheartening and unbecoming; because the former seems blatantly ignore the values of the elderly people. In this context, there is a need of social work intervention for protecting the rights and entitlements of the elderly, advocating for their justice, freedom and equitable share of opportunities. For many older wage workers, engaged themselves in manual works is an important avenue for their economic security, enhanced social interaction, and improved quality of life. Through their income, they can fulfill their aspirations and meet up the economic needs of the family dependants. Apart from that, very vital aspects in the life of workers is the safety, health, and well-being at their workplace, right from the time or day of joining to the job to the last. It means that, there must be adequate safety networks to protect their rights in event of any mishaps.

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