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Influence of Occupational factors among women tea Pluckers of Assam

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Abstract

Being rich in natural resources, Assam is known for tea, the plant that grows naturally in Upper Brahmaputra valley of the state. Bestowed with the title 'State drink of Assam', tea happens to be one of the oldest and most beloved beverage of the state. Women being the primary worker in the garden are employed particularly for the tea plucking task. They spend hours in standing, plucking and carrying the tea leaves in basket which is perceived to be the most strenuous task. The aim of the study is to determine the occupational factors and assess the behaviour of the respondents towards the occupational factors. With respect to the objectives of the study, in-depth personal interviews were conducted on the chosen 60 respondents selected randomly from Dekorai tea estate of Biswanath district, Assam. To achieve this purpose, the study was guided by questions in the area of background information of the respondents, occupational factors in terms of three aspects: work related factors, organizational factors and familial factors, behaviour of the respondents towards the occupational factors. The study reveals that the socio-economic life of the women tea pluckers' is woeful. The difficulty faced by the tea pluckers was found to be highest in organisational factor. This necessitates immediate policy initiatives to improve their socioeconomic status, which will bring about social and economic transformation in our country.

Keywords: Women Tea pluckers, Occupational Factors

Introduction

Assam has developed to become the world's largest tea-producing province and India's largest tea-producing state. Tea accounts for 17% of the state's revenue. Tea from Assam is still one of the most well-known and appreciated beverage in India, with industry insiders estimating that 80 percent of the tea produced in the state is consumed domestically. The Plantation Labour Act (PLA) in Assam requires tea plantations to offer a reasonable living in terms of housing, education, drinking water, food supply, firewood, healthcare, child care, maternal care, and accident insurance. The PLA (1951) also oversees the salaries and working hours of permanent tea workers. The irony is that the working conditions of tea plantation employees are appalling; they have been denied access to all essential necessities like as drinking water, bathroom facilities, appropriate sanitation, and a clean environment, as well as basic health and medical care. According to the provision of section 17 of the Plantation Labour Act 1951, every worker shall be provided an umbrella, blanket, one pair of chappal, rain-coat and other protective materials free of cost.

However, these materials can fulfill partial demand only. The wage structure is also another issue of the majority of the members of this community as the wages are lowest among the organized sector. The majority of the community resides in tea estate labour lines, which are erected within the tea farmers' tea plantations. They work as farm labourers and reside on the tea estate's modest facilities. The population remains backward as the estates are typically located in isolated places, which adds to their exploitation by the tea planters. Because of reasons such as poverty, lack of education, rising population, and addiction to country beer, the group is one of Assam's most backward and exploited.

The tea industry is a labor-intensive industry that employs a considerable number of women (approximately 52 percent of the total workforce) (Government of India, 2015). Tea pickers must work in a range of climates and perilous scenarios while maintaining an uncomfortable static position. Their work is extremely tedious, working for eight hours daily, resulting in fatigue. They perform their activity in constant motion from morning to evening with less

breaks demanding high cost of energy. The repetition of the activity along with work load and stress unknowingly affects their health. They give no importance to the frequent body pain, aches, neck pain, arm and shoulder pain, etc. that gets built due to the activity performed. The labour productivity also depends on the favourable condition of the work place. The work environment must be congruent to the workers prioritizing health and efficiency which later affects production. This drudgery prone activity results in their back breaking and affecting health adversely. A work place must deal with many facets of worker's well-being. Overuse injuries or repetitive stress may occur if a person is engaged in movements that are unhealthy. The same movement repeated day after day, over a long term develops the injury. A huge portion of people's life, almost one-third, is spent at work. So, a repetitive stress or posture-related injury is likely to take place in the workplace. "The application of human biological science in conjunction with engineering research to the worker and his working environment in order to promote productivity," according to the International Labor Organization (1989). Keeping this in view the study has been carried out to determine the occupational factors of the tea plucking women and also to assess the behaviour of the respondents towards the occupational factors.

Materials and Methods

The research was carried out in the Assam district of Biswanath. Assam was chosen purposively for carrying out the present study as tea is the pride of Assam. Biswanath has 8 community development blocks out of which, Naduar development block was selected randomly for the study. The Naduar Revenue Circle covers a total of 188 villages out of which Dekorai tea estate was selected randomly from Itakhola of Assam. Dekorai tea estate is one of the finest quality of tea producing estate of the Biswanath Tea Company comprising a total of 612 numbers of women tea pluckers. A total of 60 (sixty) respondents were selected by following proportionate random sampling method for the study. The main purpose of the study is to determine the occupational factors along with their behaviour towards the occupational factors. The study was descriptive in nature and the data were collected with the help of a structured interview schedule, where all the selected sixty respondents were interviewed personally in their respective village area of the tea estate. Information regarding their personal attributes, i.e. family, social well-being, habits, working environment and their views related to their work and tea company were recorded. The occupational factors of tea pluckers are assessed in terms of three aspects: work related factors, organizational factors and familial factors. Behaviour of the respondents towards the occupational factors was analysed with sixty statements which were scored with 4 point continuum, i.e. always (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), never (1), and the total score was calculated for each respondent. Weighted mean score was calculated to find the level of difficulty faced by the respondents because of the occupational factors.

Major findings of the Study

Demographic profile of women tea workers

The demographic profile of the respondents shows that

women of 20 years and above are mostly involved in tea plucking activity in the state of Assam. Almost 61.67 percent of the respondents were illiterate. About 60 percent of the respondents earn Rs. 2000 - Rs. 3000 monthly. 93.33 percent had their monthly earnings above Rs. 5000. 46.67 percent of respondents had at least two family members that are financially dependent on the family's earning members. 55 percent of the respondents had extended type of family. Maximum number of the respondents (41.67%) had 3 to 6 family members, and majority of the respondents (30%) had two children.

Table 1: Demographic profile of women tea workers, (n = 60)

S. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Age			
i.	Below 20 years	3	5
ii.	20-30 years	16	26.67
iii.	30- 40 years	11	18.33
iv.	40 years and above	30	50
Education			
i.	Above intermediate	-	-
ii.	Upto intermediate	-	-
iii.	Upto high school	9	15
iv.	Upto primary	14	23.33
v.	Illiterate	37	61.67
Income (monthly)			
i.	Below Rs. 2000/-	-	-
ii.	Rs. 2000 – Rs. 3000/-	36	60
iii.	Rs. 3000 - Rs. 4000/-	24	40
iv.	Above Rs. 4000/-	-	-
Family Income			
i.	Below Rs. 3000/-	1	1.67
ii.	Rs. 3000 – Rs. 4000/-	3	5
iii.	Rs. 4000 – Rs. 5000/-	-	-
iv.	Above Rs. 5000/-	56	93.33
Dependent members			
i.	1	6	10
ii.	2	28	46.67
iii.	3	21	35
iv.	4	5	8.33
Family type			
i.	Joint	10	16.67
ii.	Nuclear	17	28.33
iii.	Extended	33	55
Family size			
i.	Upto 3	7	11.67
ii.	3-6	25	41.67
iii.	6-9	23	38.33
iv.	9 and above	5	8.33
Children			
i.	0	5	8.33
ii.	1	7	11.67
iii.	2	18	30
iv.	3	17	28.33
v.	4	10	16.67
vi.	5	3	5

Occupational factors: The occupational factors of tea pluckers are assessed in terms of three aspects: work related factors, organizational factors and familial factors. So, to assess these three aspects, some statements has been formulated illustrating their level of difficulty in four point

Likert’s scale, i.e. always (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), never (1), and the scores has been given accordingly.

Work related occupational factors

After calculating the weighted mean score of the three aspects, it was found that “Work related Occupational factors” achieved the second highest average weighted mean score. In this way, the “Work Related Occupational factors”

is ranked 2nd.

The result draws the fact that the difficulties faced by the selected respondents were less in work related factors than in organizational factors. This is because the respondents are accustomed to the same activity for years and it was meant for them. So, they somehow know the fact and so carry on their work without much complain.

Table 2: Respondents' distribution as per Work Related Occupational Factors

S. NO	Factors	Always %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Never %	Wt. score	Rank
	Statements						
1	Unpleasant work condition?	-	1.67	56.67	41.67	160.02	2
2.	Repetitive and dull work?	45	53.33	1.67	-	343.33	
3.	Extended period of work without breaks?	3.33	21.67	55	20	208.33	
4.	Disgusted of working long hours?	53.33	41.67	5	-	348.33	
5.	Workload not evenly distributed?	33.33	60	1.67	5	321.66	
6.	Have to carry heavy load?	93.33	6.67	-	-	393.33	
7.	Posture un comfort ability?	86.67	13.33	-	-	386.67	
8.	Holding one posture for longer interval?	80	20	-	-	380	
9.	Have to work very fast?	15	76.67	8.33	-	306.67	
10.	Force applied on hand or wrist?	15	76.67	6.67	1.67	305.02	
11.	Difficulty in working for long day in hot or rainy season?	25	33.33	36.33	5	278.33	
12.	Feeling of exhaustion at the end of the day?	50	50	-	-	350	
13.	Flexibility in job during working hours?	46.67	53.33	-	-	346.67	
14.	Pain in head for carrying the bag?	30	70	-	-	330	
15.	Pressure of authority in the plucking amount?	25	75	-	-	325	
16.	Bending for long hours creates disturbance in continuing the work?	30	50	20	46.67	310	
17.	Less rest breaks?	3.33	-	50	-	159.99	
18.	Is the work area properly organized?	83.33	10	1.67	-	366.66	
19.	Repetitive movements?	53.33	41.67	5	-	348.33	
20.	Is there sufficient recovery between movements?	46.67	48.33	5	-	341.67	

Table 3: Behaviour of Respondents as per their Work Related Occupational Factors

Work Related Occupational Factors	(n=60)	
	f	%
Good (72.66)	3	5
Average (44.51-72.66)	38	63.33
Poor (44.51)	19	31.67

Table No.3 elicited that majority of the respondents (63.33%) evolve ‘average’ behaviour towards the work-

related occupational factors. Only 5 percent of the respondents had ‘good’ behaviour and the rest 31.67 percent showed ‘poor’ behaviour towards the work-related occupational factors. This might be because of their work environment, pressure from authority or repetitive and dull work that they have to do to earn their livelihood. The tea plucking women has been doing the same work for years and at times they might feel uneasy for working long hours by carrying load in their back to perform the same activity repetitively daily.

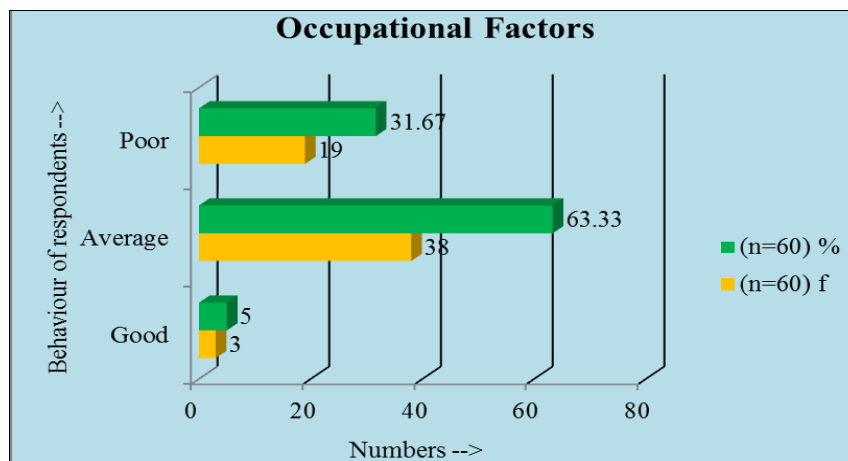


Fig 1: Behaviour of Respondents as per Occupational Factors

Work related organisational factors

After calculating the weighted mean score of the three aspects, it was found that “Organizational factors” achieved

the highest average weighted mean score. In this way, the “Organizational factors” is ranked 1st.

So, the difficulty faced by the tea pluckers was found to be

highest in organizational factor which indicates that the rules and conditions set by the organization rigid affecting the respondents in various ways. It might be due to the fact that the tea industries were established by the Britisher's

before Independence of India and since that period, the organization was under their control. So, the terms and conditions were not effectively changed in later period. Not many changes were brought out regarding the workers.

Table 4: Respondents' distribution as per Motivational Facilities Provided by the Organization

SL. No.	Facilities Statements	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Wt. score	Rank
		%	%	%	%		
1	Do you get any reward (bonus)?	100	-	-	-	400	1
2	Do you get any recognition for good work?	-	10	33.33	56.67	153.33	
3	Do you face criticism while in work?	3.33	53.33	15	28.33	231.64	
4	Does the authority provide house?	100	-	-	-	400	
5	Is the kind of house provided good enough?	100	-	-	-	400	
6	Is the house allotted sufficient?	100	-	-	-	400	
7	Does the house have a toilet?	100	-	-	-	400	
8	Does the authority provide sanitary latrine?	100	-	-	-	400	
9	Does the authority provide any drinking water facility?	100	-	-	-	400	
10	Do you have access to electricity facility?	100	-	-	-	400	
11	Does the authority supply any fuel?	100	-	-	-	400	
12	Is there any school in the garden area?	100	-	-	-	400	
13	Is there any labour welfare centre in the garden?	100	-	-	-	400	
14	Does the authority provide any homestead land for farming/gardening?	-	8.33	-	91.66	116.65	
15	Is there any scope to rear cattle?	-	21.67	20	58.33	163.34	
16	Does the authority provide ration?	100	-	-	-	400	
17	Does the authority provide essentials-blanket and footwear tarpaulin?	100	-	-	-	400	
18	Does the authority provide umbrella to work under the rain?	100	-	-	-	400	
19	Does the authority provide tarpaulin?	100	-	-	-	400	
20	Does the authority provide any festival allowances?	100	-	-	-	400	
21	Is there any provision of pension?	100	-	-	-	400	
22	Do you get leave with wages?	100	-	-	-	400	
23	Do the authority provide gratuity?	100	-	-	-	400	
24	Are you eligible for gratuity?	100	-	-	-	400	
25	Is there any PF facilities?	100	-	-	-	400	
26	Are you eligible for PF facility?	100	-	-	-	400	
27	Fed up of deadlines?	-	41.67	21.67	36.67	205.02	
28	Fed up of monotonous routine?	6.67	45	20	28.33	230.01	
29	Understanding co-workers?	41.67	55	3.33	-	338.34	
30	Understanding organization members?	8.33	66.67	20	5	242.33	

Table 5: Behaviour of Respondents towards their Motivational Facilities Provided by the Organization

Organizational Factors	(n=60)	
	f	%
Good(108.46)	9	15
Average (103.48-108.46)	43	71.67
Poor(103.48)	8	13.33

Table no. 5 unveiled that a large number of respondents (71.67%) establish 'average' behaviour towards the

organizational factors. A considerable number of respondents (15%) develop 'good' behaviour and 13.33 percent of the respondents exhibit 'poor' behaviour towards the organizational factors. The respondents are to some extent content towards the motivational facilities provided by the organization. Though they are not economically sound or their condition is not good enough but the basic needs provided by the organization along with the other facilities keep them going.

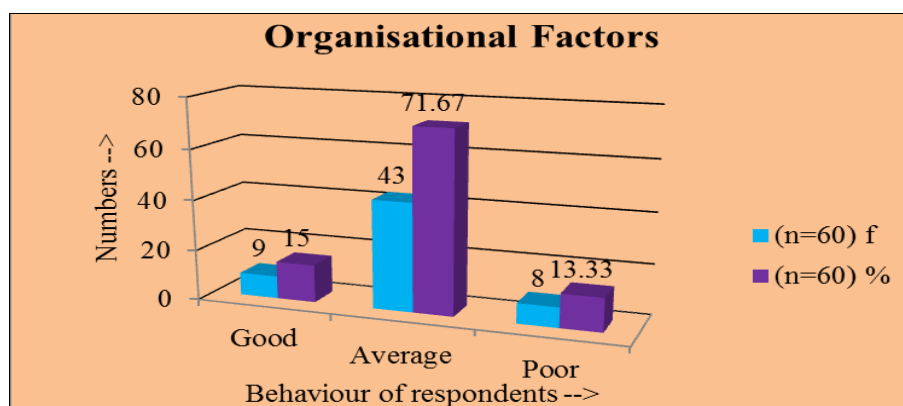


Fig 2: Behaviour of Respondents towards Organizational Factors

Work related familial factors

After calculating the weighted mean score of the three aspects, it was found that “Familial factors” achieved the third highest average weighted mean score. In this way, the “Organizational factors” is ranked 3rd. The outcome of the data elicit that the difficulties faced by the selected tea pluckers was less than both organizational

and work related occupational factors. The factors or difficulties that comes with families are something that every family experiences and so the respondents had to live with it anyhow. Family problems are something that will never end and knowing the fact, the respondents carry on their lives with it.

Table 6: Respondents' distribution as per Work Related Familial Factors

S. No	Factors Statement	Always %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Never %	Wt. score	Rank
1.	Do you consume alcohol?	11.67	41.67	25	21.66	243.35	3
2.	Do other members in your family also consume alcohol?	-	-	60	40	160	
3.	Do you spend all your income in alcohol?	-	18.33	15	66.67	151.66	
4.	Do your family problems come in your way of work?	6.67	40	21.67	31.67	221.69	
5.	Is there any difficulty in managing household chores along with work?	11.67	46.67	20	21.67	248.36	
6.	Is there any cooperation from other household members in managing the house?	23.33	43.33	20	15	278.31	
7.	Do conflicts in house disturb your work?	6.67	25	16.67	51.67	186.69	
8.	Does the habit of alcohol consumption create problems?	6.67	46.67	23.33	23.33	236.68	
9.	Is it difficult to manage children?	13.33	46.67	5	35	238.33	
10.	Does illness of family member creates stress in work?	1.67	48.33	15	35	216.67	

Table 7: Behaviour of Respondents towards their work related work related Familial Factors

Familial Factors	(n=60)	
	f	%
Good(34.35)	5	8.33
Average (19.51-34.45)	37	61.67
Poor(19.51)	18	30

(61.67%) grow ‘average’ behaviour towards the family factors. Very few numbers of respondents (8.33%) bring out ‘good’ behaviour and the remaining 30 percent of the respondents displayed ‘poor’ behaviour. The data reveal that the respondents are not very much happy with their familial factors. Alcoholism is a major factor that ruins the peace of the family. Conflicts, managing household problems and illness add on to their discontentment.

Table no. 7 illustrated that more than half of the respondents

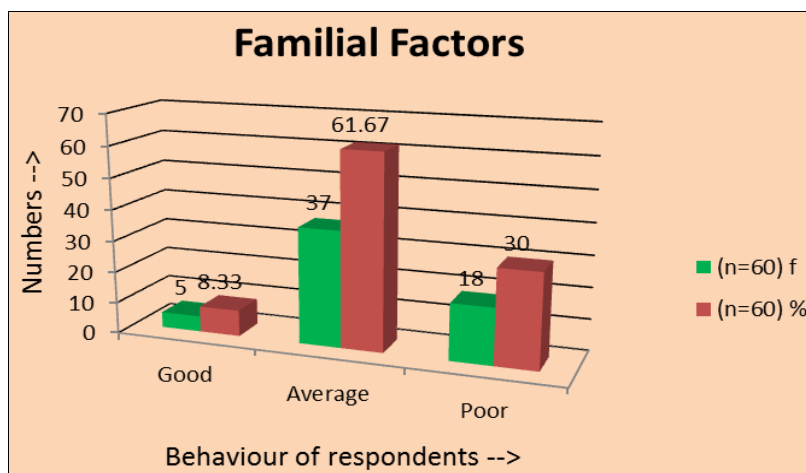


Fig 3: Behaviour of Respondents towards Familial Factors

Conclusion

Thus, the workers' economic situation has barely improved, which has led to a decline in both their social standing and health. Since workers' health is their most valuable asset, a decline in their health would cause them to fall further behind in other areas. Their monthly earning is not sufficient to meet all the needs of the members being in extended family type. Majority of the respondents has been involved in the activity for more than thirty years which implicates that they are likely to develop work related musculoskeletal disorders. Increased rate of illiteracy results in the women respondents not being conscious about their

rights and benefits. Lack of awareness is the root cause. Ache in the body, neck, head; pain in shoulder, hand and wrist; very severe level of discomfort in shoulder, hand/wrist and lower back are the problems suffered by the respondents. The females have a high probability to be anemic, suffer from health problems, victims of child marriage, being deserted by husbands after bearing children or being the bread earner even after having a husband. The females perform their work in usual casual postures which leads to musculoskeletal problems and then to drudgery as they were unable to realize the cost of energy and other muscular efforts. Thus, there is a need to develop

awareness, knowledge, and training programmes for improving working conditions, in order to reduce women's drudgery at work and increase productivity. Thus, by identifying the risk factors a strict supervision system must be formulated to check their work habit. To enhance the workers' health, the government and the tea estates must therefore make a sincere and quick policy reform.

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