

The Rationale behind the Migratory Affairs in Perumbavoor, Nellimattom, and Nellikuzhi: A Case Study of the Pandemic Scenario

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Abstract:

Migrant laborers have become a vital part of Kerala's economy. Kerala is witnessing a large influx of migrant laborers from different parts of the country in recent years. People started to move all around the country in search of gainful employment, better living conditions, and a possible standard of living. The large-scale migrant labourers are entering Kerala from Assam, Orissa, West Bengal, and Jharkhand. In this context, an attempt is made to analyse the underlying factors responsible for the heavy influx of migrants to Kerala and the study also concentrates on the covid 19 impact on migrant labourers based on the data from a sample of 100 migrant labourers from Ernakulum district. High wages in Kerala and low wages in their state, lack of opportunities, family responsibilities, and uneconomical agriculture in their home state have been identified as the main factors responsible for migration to Kerala.

Keywords: Migrant laborers, influx, migration, employment, covid 19.

Introduction

Migration has a long history in human existence. From the very beginning man began to go to different places in search of a better destination. During the 1980s and 1990s, migrant laborers came to Kerala from places like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh in search of gainful employment and better living conditions, and they were accommodated in the construction and other unskilled employments mainly ironing clothes. In contrast, they are coming from the far-flung states of Orissa, Assam, West Bengal, and Jharkhand. The migration data of census 2011 also indicated that a large number of migrants are arriving in different urban areas, particularly metro cities from different states. There are about 2.5 to 3 million

migrant workers working in various sectors in Kerala. Today, apart from the urban areas of Kerala, they have spread to the villages also. In Kerala, they are blessed with a wide range of occupations including the construction sector, cashew processing, plywood industries, wooden furniture, marine fishing, mining and quarrying, footwear sector, hotel and restaurants, and malls. The main reasons for people to migrate to Kerala are low wages, low employment opportunities, family responsibilities, floods, crop failure, and drought in their native place. Unceasing employment opportunities, a good social environment, less discrimination, and educational and health facilities in Kerala motivate them to stick here.

Migrant labourers have played a significant role in the state workforce for the past three decades. The national lockdown announced on March 25, 2020, to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 infection has been devastating for the country's migrant workers. With the exception of those working in the essential services, everyone lost their jobs. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers and their families, including children, were pushed to the streets. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to extensive challenges to public health and food systems. The pandemic slowdown has deeply impacted businesses and jobs around the country. Especially companies - micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) – are under intense strain. “Unlike other states, migrant workers in Kerala enjoy better rights and have greater access to health, education, and housing. While migrant laborers are being forced to leave cities in north India in droves in the wake of the Covid 19 outbreak, the Kerala government has been taking proactive steps to ensure the welfare of guest workers in the state right from undertaking health screening, delivering food or food items and setting up help desks to allay their concerns” (Times of India Apr 4, 2020)

This study was carried out in some areas of Ernakulam dist. namely, Perumbavoor, Nellimattom, and Nellikuzhi. Perumbavoor lies in the north-eastern tip of the Greater Cochin area and is also the headquarters of Kunnathunad Taluk. It has many immigrants from other

parts of India, including West Bengal, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh. Most work in plywood or other industries. Tamils, Assamese, and Nepalese have special colonies of their own. Nellimattom is a small Village in Kothamangalam Block in Ernakulam District of Kerala State, India. Nellikuzhi” The furniture village of Kerala a Gramapanchayath in Kothamangalam Taluk, Ernakulam Dist, Kerala,

Methodology

The present study is based on a field survey carried out in the district of Ernakulam in Kerala. The survey sample included 100 migrant workers from West Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Sikkim, Mizoram, Bihar, and Kolkata who had been working in Kerala. The purpose of this paper is to find out the reasons favoring the heavy influx of migrant laborers into the state and analyze the Covid 19 impact on migrant laborers. The study is limited to three places in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. For the primary data collection, a field survey was conducted among the migrant laborers in Perumbavoor, Nellimattom, and Nellikuzhi where the greatest number of migrant labourers exists. A very limited sample size of 100 casual workers seeking work in the labour market on a day-to-day basis has been interviewed by using a pre-structured questionnaire. Migrant laborers are interviewed directly and analyzed on the basis of primary data. We have taken the help of the local contractors to find out their working places and the places where they have been living. The data collection was done by visiting either work sites or residences as per convenience. The collected data are tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted.

Analysis and Findings

The table below shows a consolidated analysis.

Table 1. Age Composition

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
20-25	39	39
25-30	21	21
30-35	15	15
35-40	13	13
40-45	12	12
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

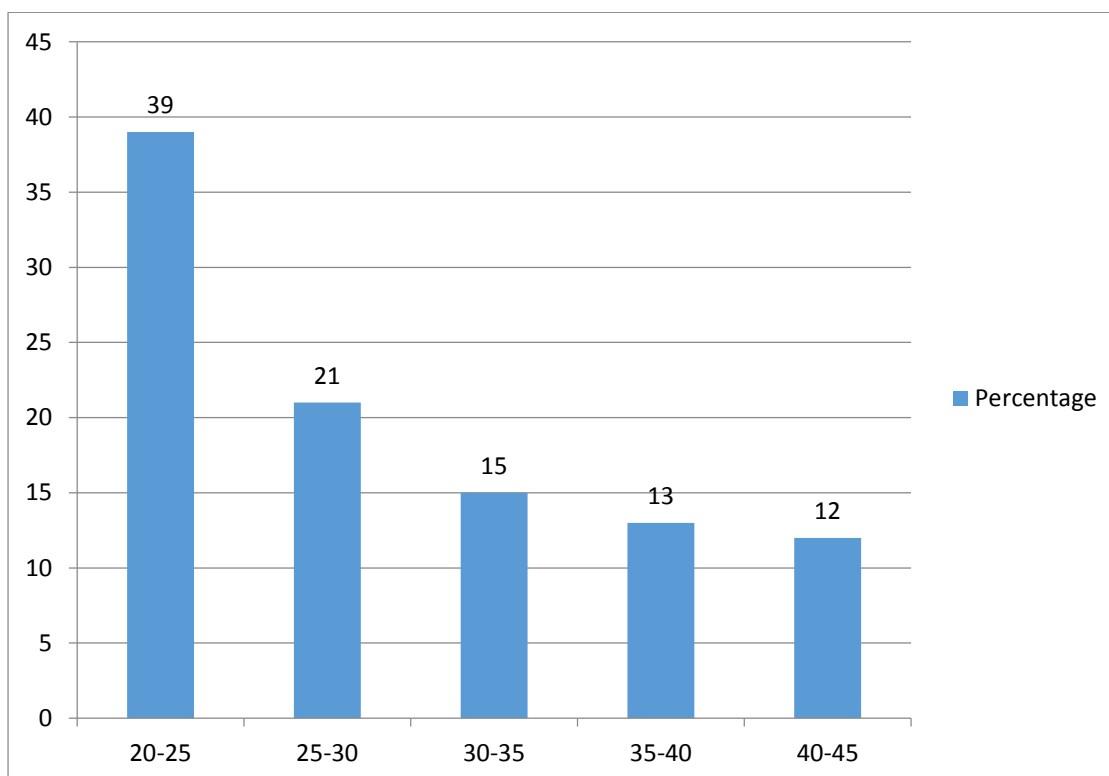


Table2. Education Level

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
LP Education	42	42
UP Education	30	30
Secondary Education	18	18
Higher Secondary Education	10	10
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

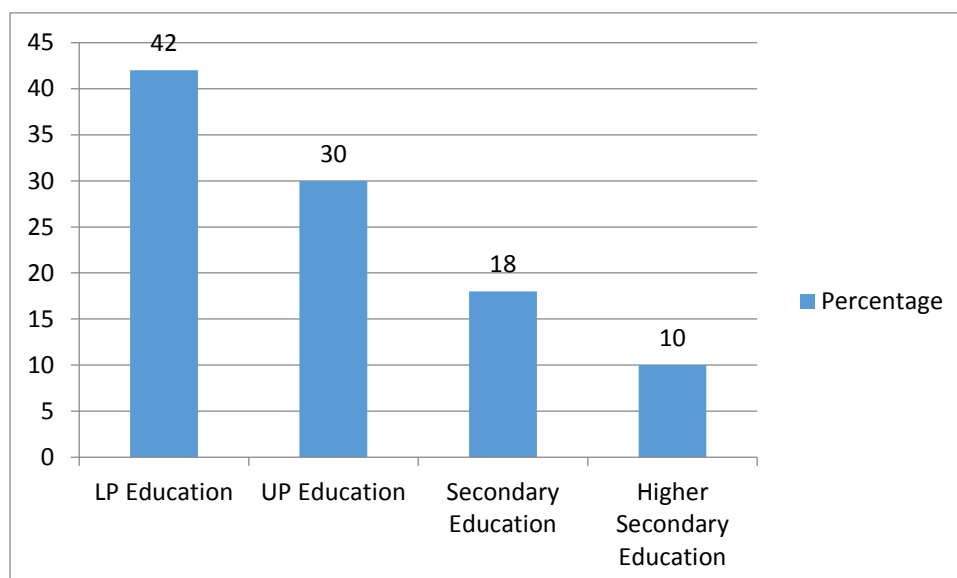


Table 3 State of Origin

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
West Bengal(Kolkata)	2	2
Sikkim	5	5
Assam	50	50
Bengal	21	21
Mizoram	5	5
Orissa	15	15
Bihar	2	2
Total	100	100

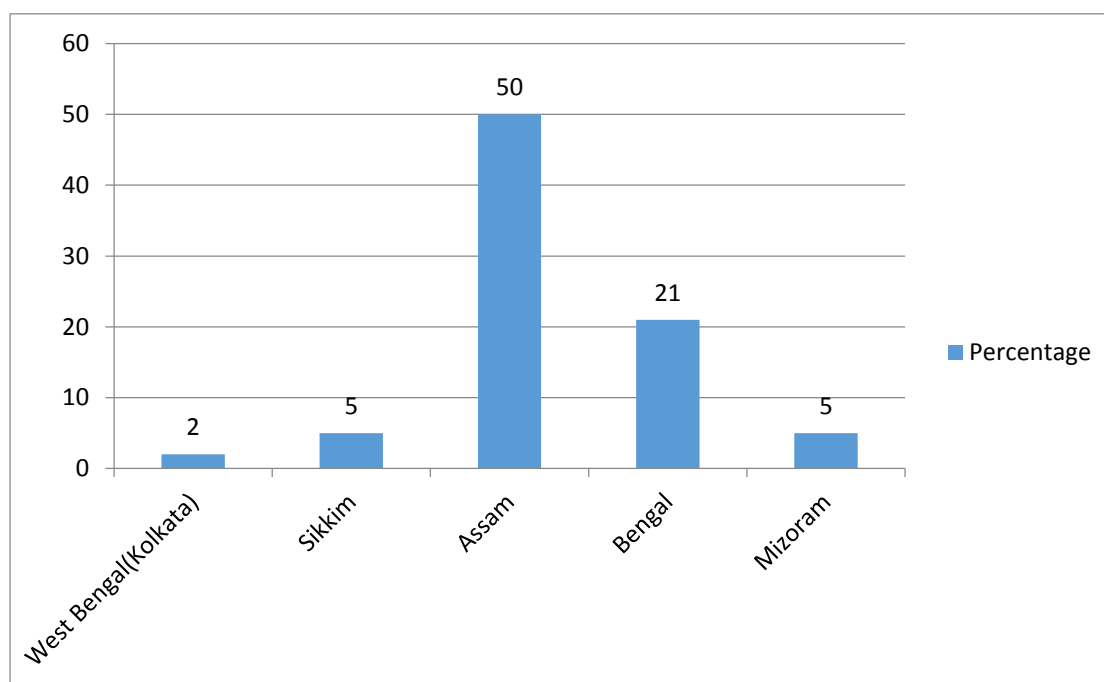


Table 4**Type of work**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Plywood company workers	30	30
Carpenters	20	20
Casual workers	10	10
Construction workers	40	40
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

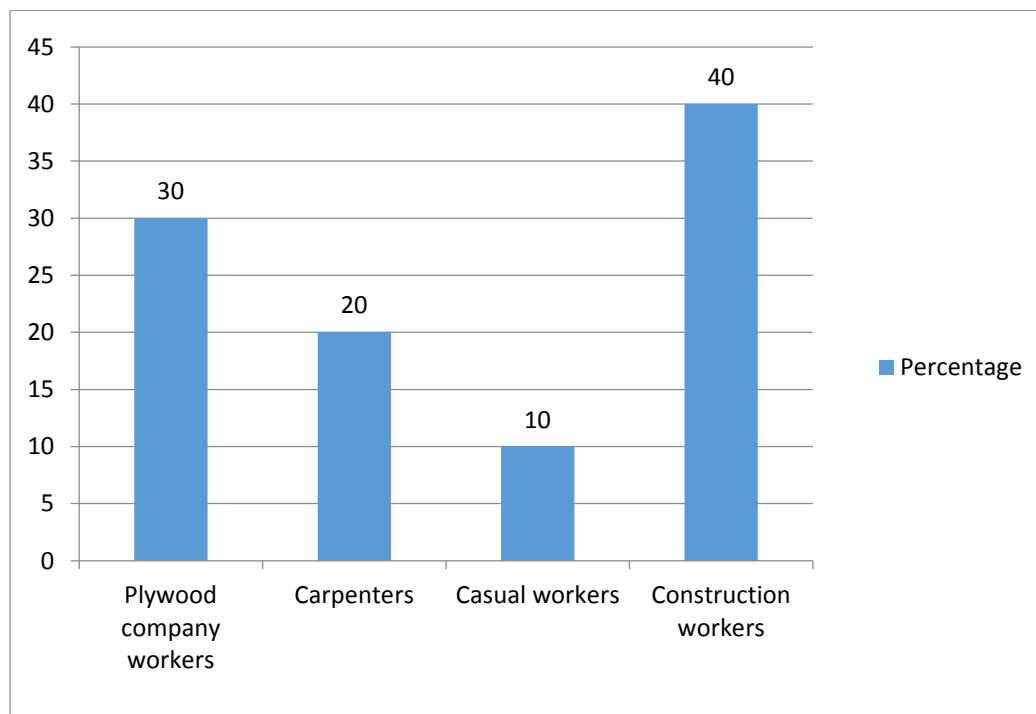
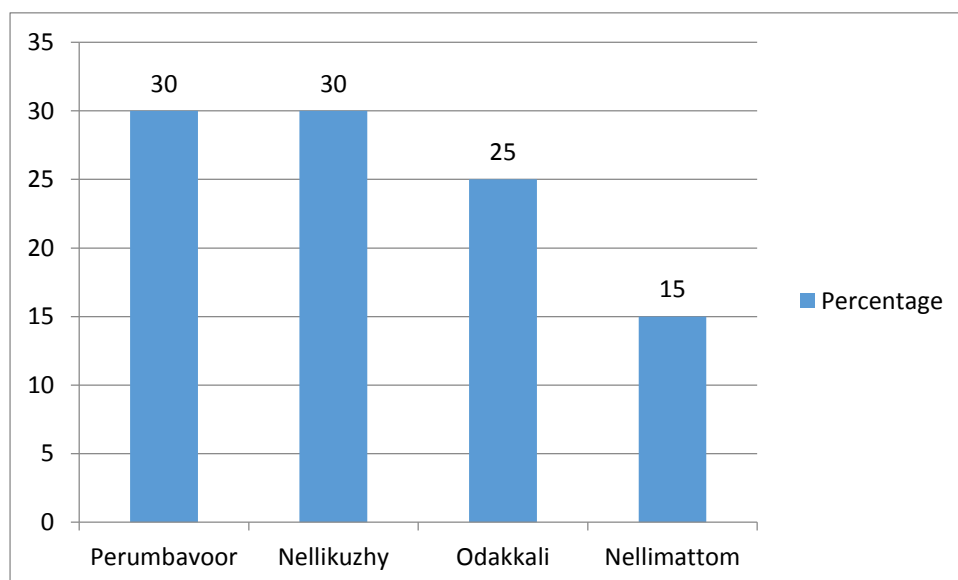


Table 5: Place of work

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Perumbavoor	30	30
Nellikuzhy	30	30
Odakkali	25	25
Nellimattom	15	15
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

**Table 6 Daily wages in their state**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
100-200	31	31
200-300	40	40
300-400	17	17
400-500	12	12

Total	100	100
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(Source: Primary Data)

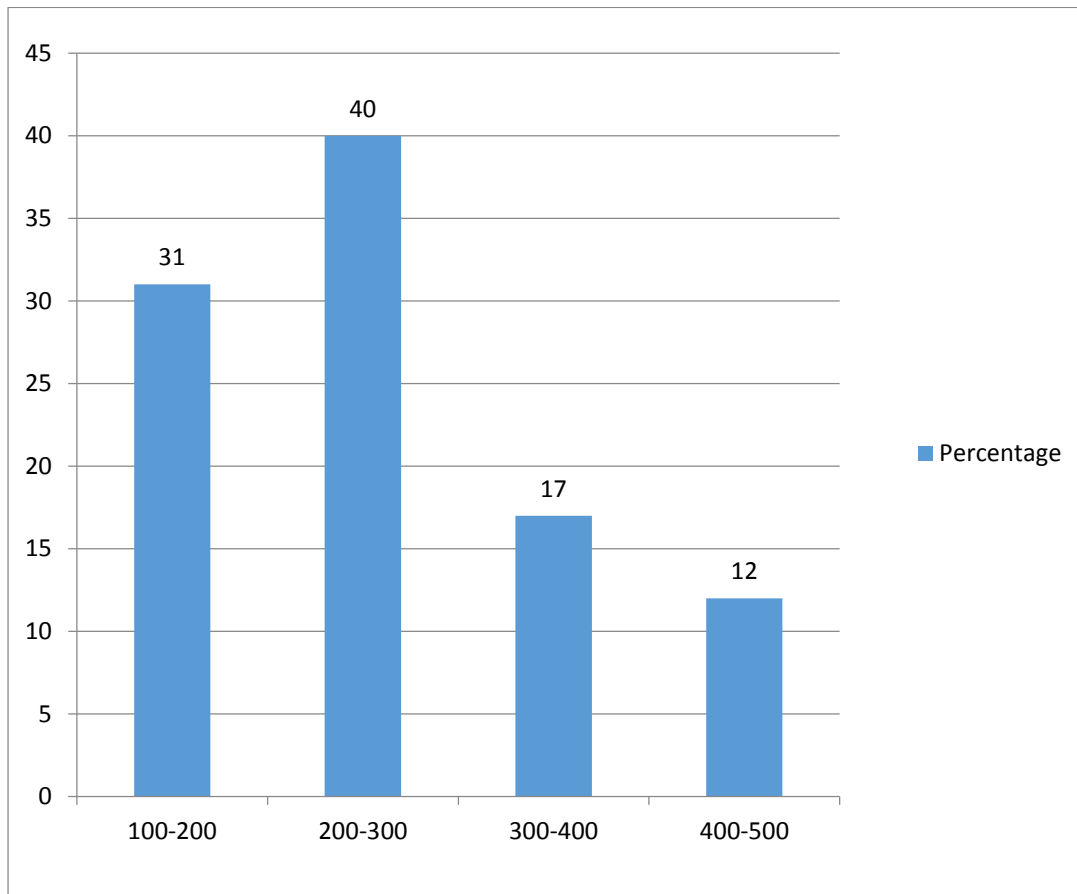


Table 7 Daily Wages in Kerala

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage

400-500	11	11
500-600	12	12
600-700	26	26
700-800	51	51
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

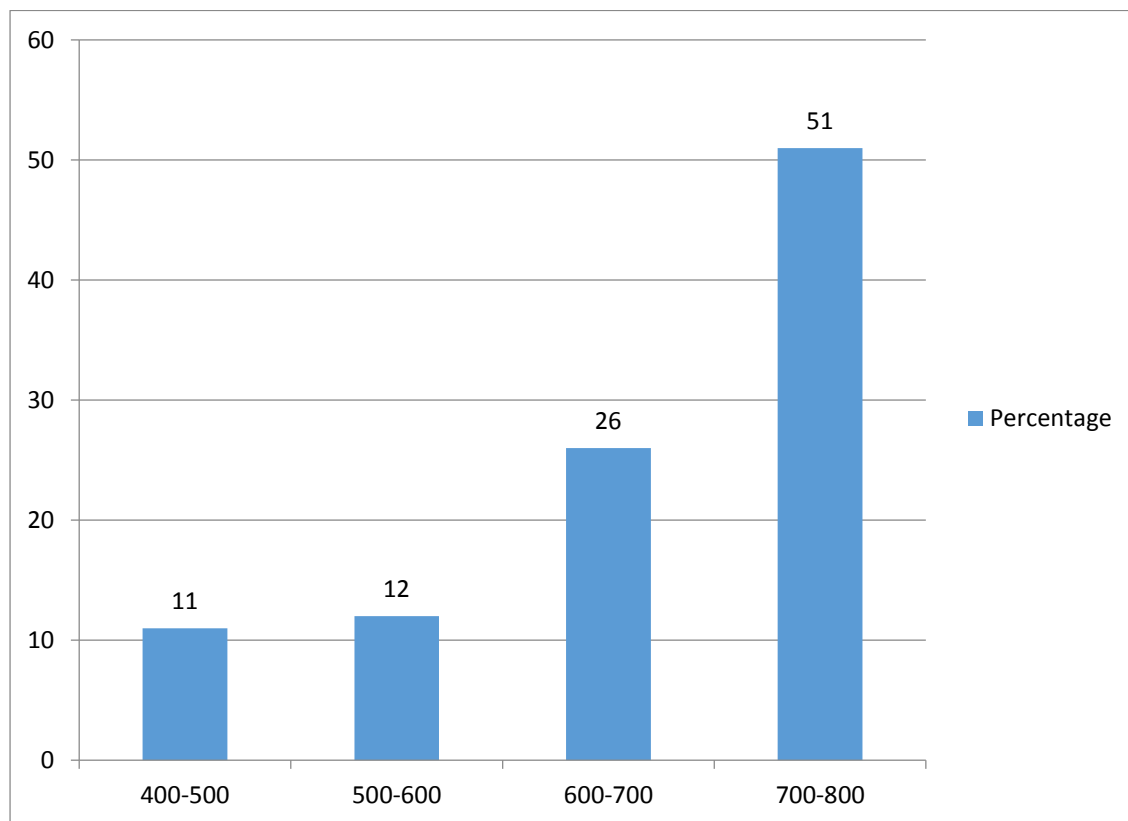


Table 8 Reasons for Migration

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
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Family problems	14	14
Unemployment	25	25
Low wages in the home state	40	40
Uneconomic agriculture	21	21
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

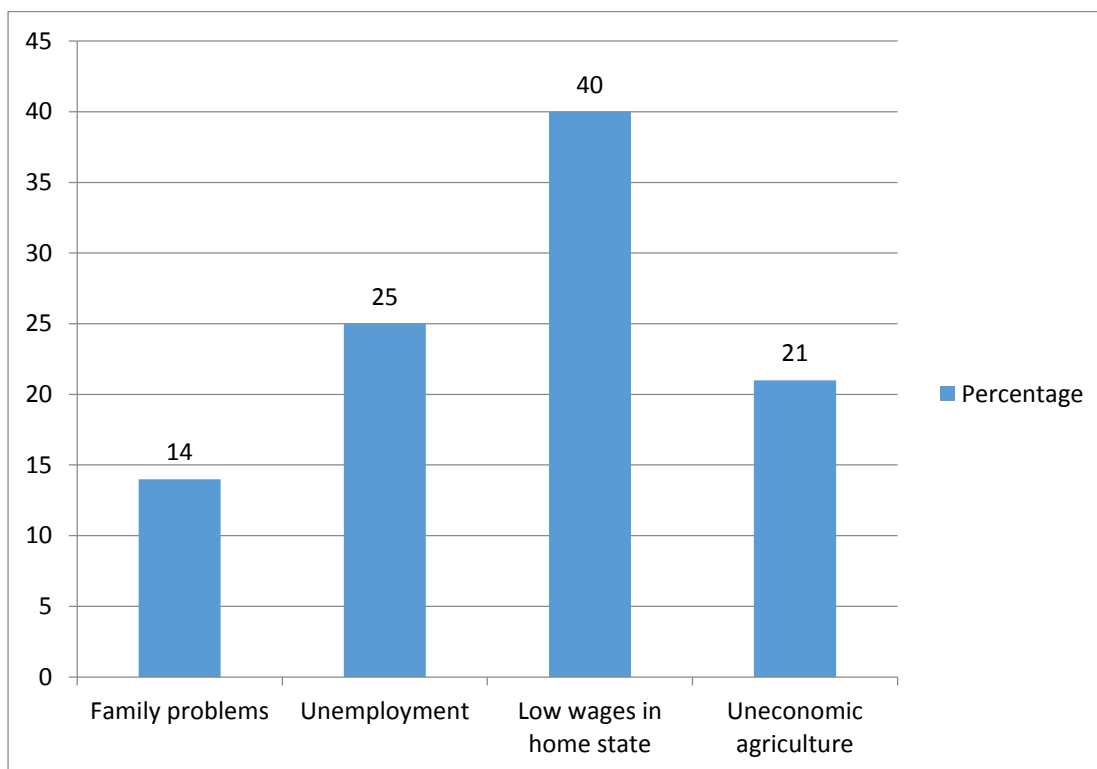


Table 9 Awareness of Covid-19

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
No Information	45	45
How to prevent covid	20	20
Where to get tested	0	0
What to do, if positive	0	0
Symptoms of covid 19	35	35
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

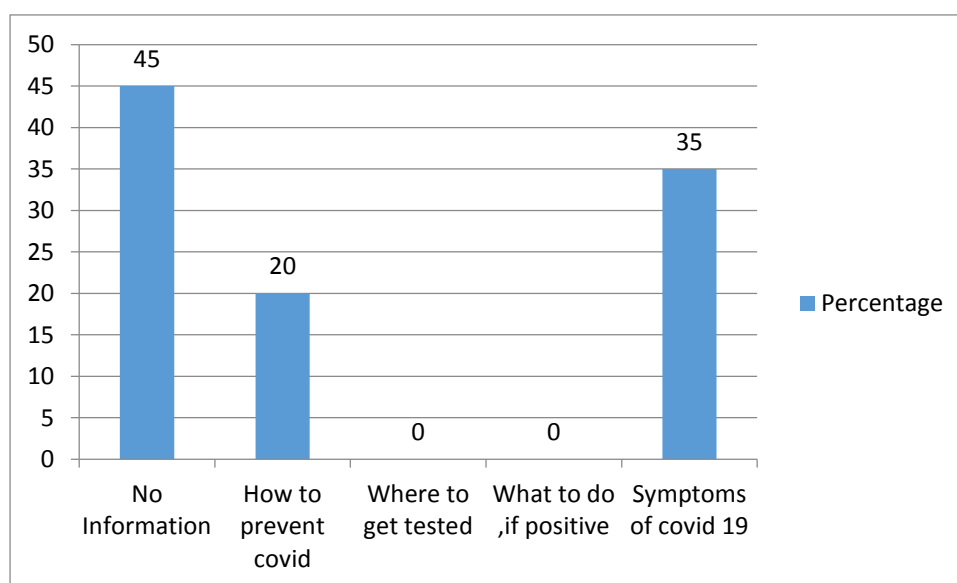


Table 10 Supported Organisation

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Government(home state)	2	2
Government(state where you work)	30	30

Union government	1	1
Employer	45	45
LSG	22	22
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

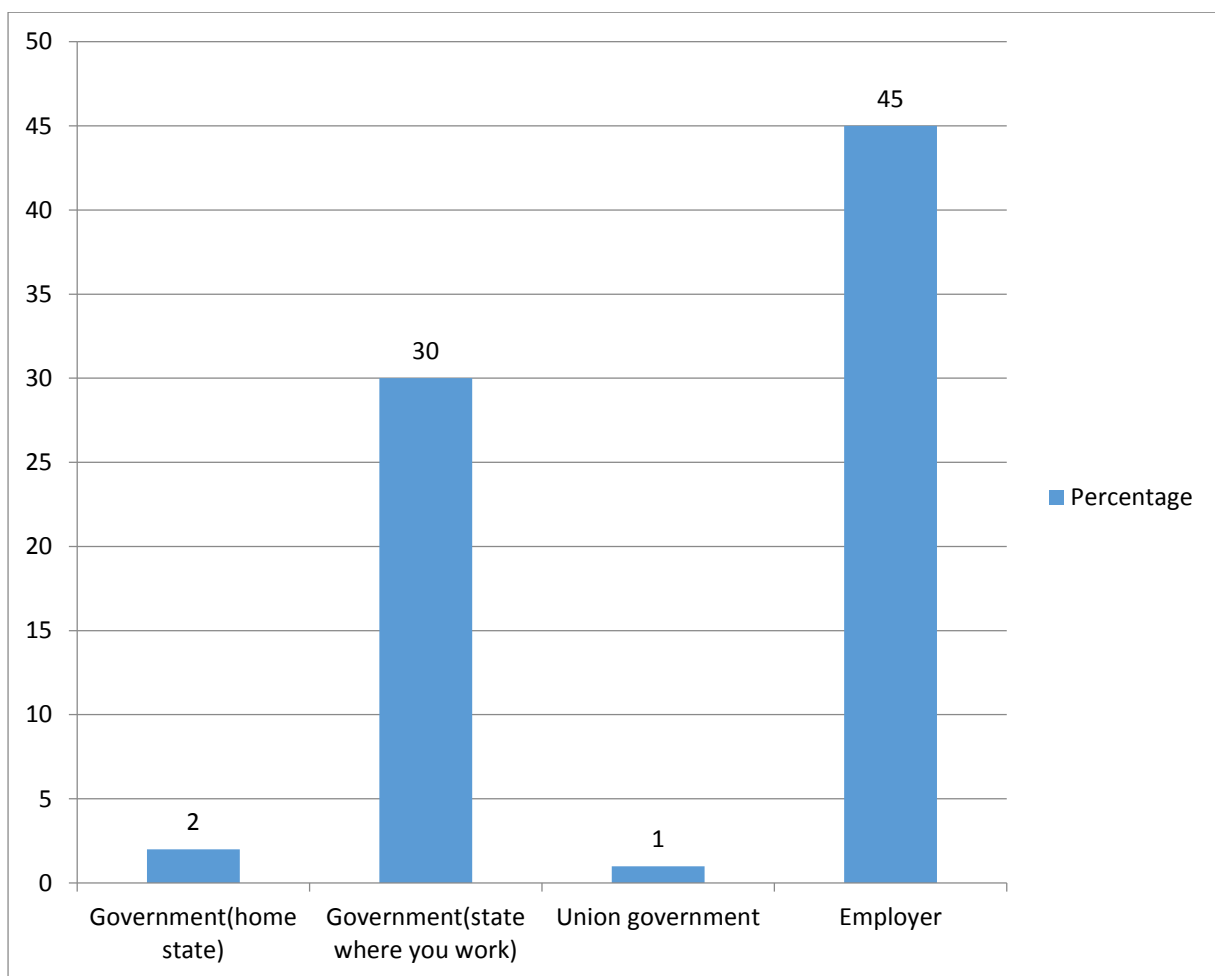


Table 11 Most Pressing Needs

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
New job	7	7
Money for food	10	10
Money for accommodation	8	8
Money for treatment	15	15
Assistance to travel back home	20	20
Assistance to travel back to work	40	40
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

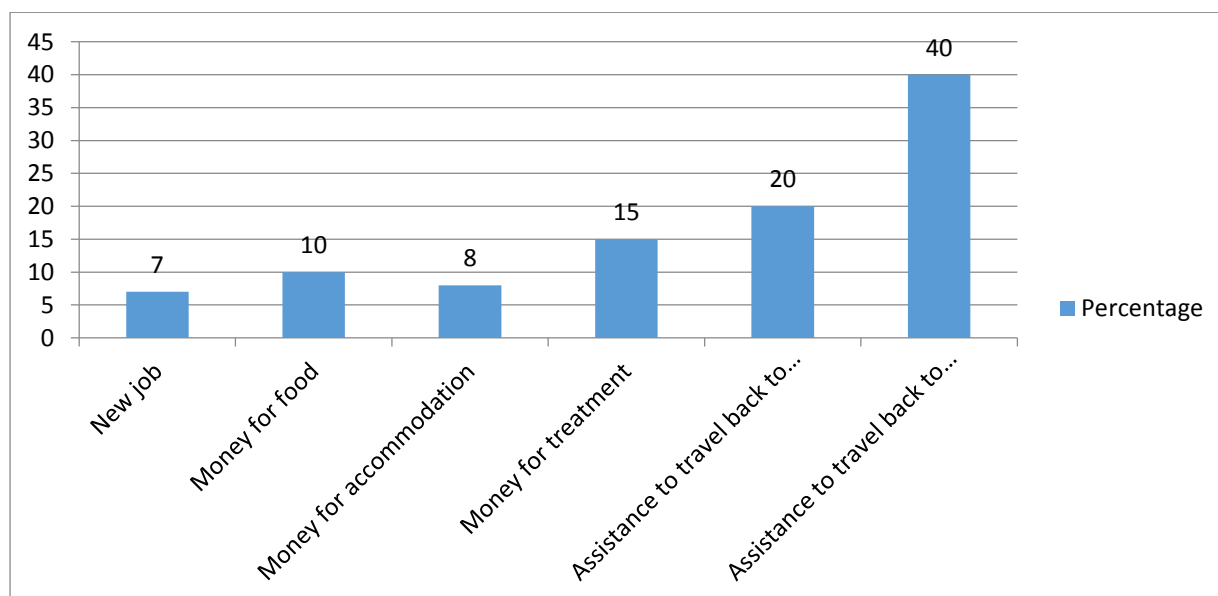


Table 12 Challenges Experienced

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Reduced income	24	24
Lost all income	50	50
No money for food and treatment	16	16
Others	10	10
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)

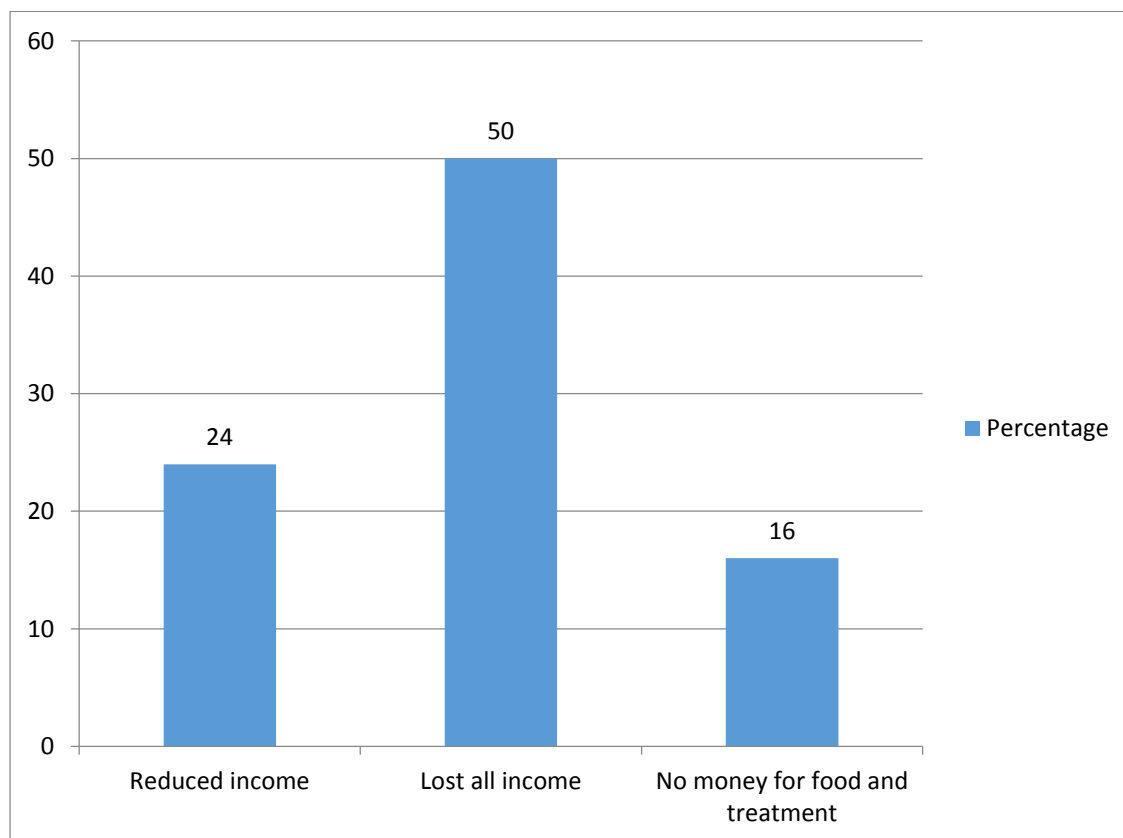
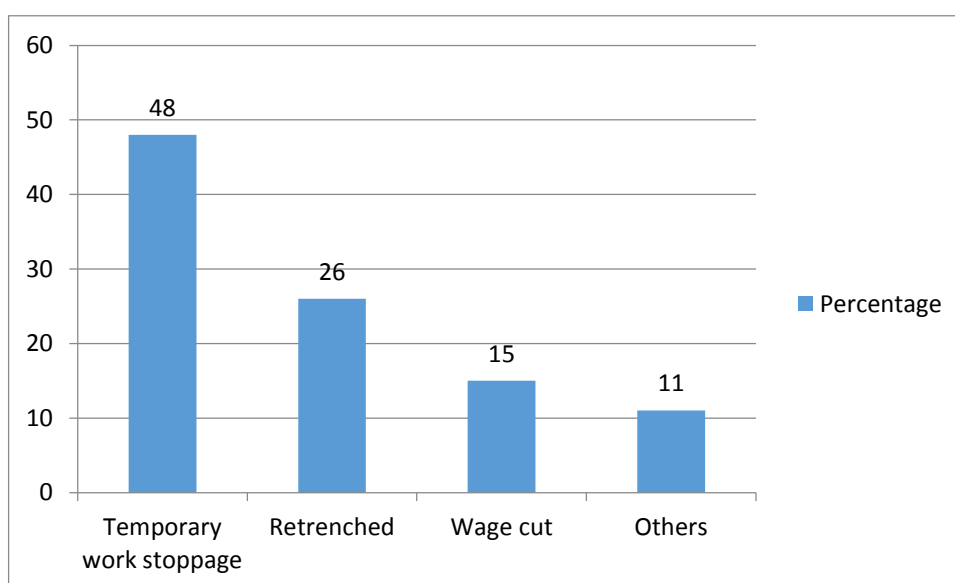


Table 13 Effects of Covid19

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
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Temporary work stoppage	48	48
Retrenched	26	26
Wage cut	15	15
Others	11	11
Total	100	100

(Source: Primary Data)



This study takes a multidimensional overview of migrant laborers in Kerala by encompassing the factors like reasons for migration, wages, and benefits obtained in Kerala, effects of Covid 19, challenges experienced and supported organizations. The first objective of the study is to analyse the factors responsible for the heavy inflow of migrants to Kerala. We can find out from the above analysis that, of the 100 responses received, 39% of the workers are from the age group 20-25 and the majority (42%) of the migrants have only LP school education. About 50% of the samples migrated to Kerala from Assam, 21% from Bengal, 15% from Orissa, and the remaining from Kolkata, Sikkim, Mizoram, and Bihar. The majority of

the respondents (40%) were construction workers, 30% of the workers were employed in plywood companies, 20% of the respondents were carpenters and casual workers constitute 10%. We can view from the above table that 51% of the migrant labourers received 700 to 800 as daily wages from Kerala instead of receiving a daily wage of 200 to 300 in their native state. The above data reveal that 40 % of the migrants leave their native place due to low wages in their own state, 25% due to unemployment, 21% due to uneconomic agriculture, and 14% due to family problems in their home state.

The migrant laborers from outside South India usually called ‘Bhais’ received reasonable wages and enjoyed the work and the peaceful life in Kerala. Kerala government has introduced several welfare schemes for out-of-state workers. Kerala is the first Indian state to enact social security schemes for migrant workers (Srivastava 2020). Under the auspices of the state education department, schools introduce special programmes for accommodating the children of migrant labourers under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. The government of Kerala has also opened secure hostels called “Apna Ghar” for migrant workers in Kerala. ‘Avas Insurance Scheme’ was launched in 2016 for migrant labourers.

The second objective of the study is to find out the consequences of covid 19 among migrant labourers in Kerala. The migrant labourers were impacted from the very first day of lockdown as they were not allowed to assemble at the junctions seeking work. As a consequence of the pandemic a large number of migrant workers, especially in the construction and hospitality sectors left the state.

However, it is found that those working in private firms (45%) stayed back as their employers provided them with food kits and other supplies until work resumed. 30% of the workers opined that the government of the state where they work had helped them the most. From this study, we can see that 45% of the workers at the destination were totally ignorant

about the Coronavirus or COVID 19. However, 35% of the workers have information about the symptoms of covid 19 and 20% of the respondents know how to prevent it and no one knows where to go to test and what to do if the test is positive, yet all the workers at the destination had heard about the Coronavirus or COVID. The most pressing need of the migrant labourers at that time was to get assistance to travel back to work. When India declared a lockdown to capture the covid 19 pandemic, many out-of-state workers working in the construction and hospitality sectors were displaced through Shramik trains and buses. Kerala made efforts to protect some of the migrant labourers by providing food and shelter. The community kitchens set up by the LSGs provide food to migrant workers for free at the beginning stages and at a cost of 20 per person at the later stages. A few workers stayed back here as their employers provided them with food kits and other supplies until work resumed.

The state government has made two weeks of rigorous quarantine mandatory for those returning to Kerala with the help of contractors and employers. Workers can return to work only with the permission of the local health authority.

Conclusion

Interstate workers have become an indispensable part of Kerala's economy, today. The attitude of the state government towards these labourers has changed over the years. At first, the government addressed them as migrant labourers and later as interstate migrant labourers. Now it has christened them "guest workers" (Times of India Apr 4, 2020)

This study tried to analyse the underlying factors responsible for the heavy inflow of migrants to Kerala and covid 19 impacts on them. The major attraction of migrants to Kerala is reported as the higher wages, availability of work and better working conditions. There are many job opportunities in the industrial and manufacturing sectors in Kerala. However, during 2020, the impact of Covid-19 on the migrants examined here and their remittances have been

disastrous. The lockdown has resulted in a huge loss of employment in almost all sectors where migrant labourers are employed. The impact of the loss of employment was severe in the case of self-employed and casual workers in the state. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers had to deal with the loss of income, food shortages, and uncertainty about their future. Due to the lockdown, with no means of transport, the Central and State governments took various steps to help them and facilitated transportation. In short, the covid 19 pandemic, subsequent lockdown, and associated measures have a catastrophic impact on both the village economies and migrant labourers of Kerala.

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