

PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AMONG MIGRANT WORKERS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THRISSUR DISTRICT OF KERALA

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Abstract:

Migrant workers constitute a vital component of Kerala's workforce, particularly in labour-intensive sectors such as construction, manufacturing, hospitality, and personal services. Thrissur District has witnessed a steady influx of migrant labour from various Indian states to meet growing employment demands. Despite their economic contributions, migrant workers often face low wages, insecure employment, inadequate working conditions, and limited access to social and welfare benefits. Social challenges, including discrimination, language barriers, and cultural differences, further impact their integration and quality of work life. This study aims to examine the perceptions, challenges, and quality of work life of migrant workers in Thrissur District using empirical data collected from primary sources. Key areas of investigation include socio-economic conditions, working environment, saving behaviour, and differences in daily life before and after migration. The findings reveal low satisfaction levels in income, employment security, and workplace conditions, while discrimination and language barriers emerge as significant challenges. By highlighting these issues, the study provides insights for policymakers, employers, and social institutions to develop targeted interventions that enhance the well-being, working conditions, and socio-economic integration of migrant workers.

Keywords: Migrant workers, Quality of work life (QWL), Socio-economic conditions, Perceptions, Challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Labour migration has become an important socio-economic phenomenon in India, largely shaped by uneven distribution of employment opportunities, income, and living standards across regions. Migrant workers contribute significantly to urban and semi-urban economies, particularly in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, hospitality, and personal services. Despite their substantial economic contributions, these workers often face precarious employment, inadequate working conditions, limited access to social and welfare benefits, and difficulties in adjusting to new cultural and social environments. Examining their perceptions and experiences is therefore vital for developing inclusive labour policies and social support mechanisms.

Kerala, and Thrissur District in particular, has experienced a steady influx of migrant workers from across India to meet the growing demand for both skilled and unskilled labour. While migration provides opportunities for employment and income, it does not always improve the quality of work life. Migrant workers frequently encounter challenges such as discrimination, language barriers, low wages, unsafe working conditions, and limited financial security, all of which negatively affect their overall well-being.

Migrant labour constitutes a critical portion of Kerala's workforce and economy. According to the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (2013), the state had approximately 2.5 million internal migrant workers, with an annual addition of around 2.35 lakh workers, rising to over 4 million by 2016 and projected to reach 5–5.5 million by 2020. These workers are essential in sustaining key sectors, and their remittances contribute nearly ₹25,000 crore annually outside the state. Structural factors such as Kerala's low population growth, a negative child population growth rate of -8.44 per cent, and the migration of educated local youth to the Gulf have created a significant demand for migrant labour in unskilled and semi-skilled sectors. Moreover, the linguistic, cultural, and social differences faced by these workers often resemble the challenges encountered in international migration, complicating their social integration. Despite their importance, there is limited empirical research at the district level examining the perceptions, socio-economic challenges, and quality of work life of migrant workers. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the perceptions, challenges, and quality of work life of migrant workers in Thrissur District, providing evidence that can guide policymakers, employers, and social institutions in improving the well-being, working conditions, and social integration of this vital workforce.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Poovancheri, A., Hyderali, K., & Sandhya, K. P. (2025) in their article on "Bridging borders, building lives: Social integration of interstate migrant workers in Kerala, India" studied the growing inflow of interstate migrant workers to Kerala driven by emigration-induced labour shortages and highlights social integration as a key contemporary challenge for the state. Focusing on the inclusion of domestic migrants within local communities, the research analyses factors that enable or constrain their social integration in Kerala. Based on primary data collected from 400 male migrant workers using multistage sampling, the study provides empirical insights into migrants' social interactions and everyday practices. The findings indicate that although migrant workers participate in certain leisure activities, their use of social media remains relatively low. The study identifies several barriers to integration, while also noting that a longer duration of stay in Kerala enhances interaction with local neighbours. Most migrants report having close friendships in the state, though this varies according to their region of origin. An integration index value of 43 reflects a moderate level of social integration between migrant workers and the host population. Overall, the study offers valuable implications for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars aiming to strengthen social cohesion and improve the well-being of interstate migrant workers in Kerala.

Sriramalu S. B. et.al. (2023) in their study on "Psychological distress and quality of community life among migratory construction workers in India" studied internal and seasonal migration as a crucial livelihood strategy in low- and middle-income countries and highlights the vulnerability of migratory construction workers in India. The findings indicate that most migrants are young adult males from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, with limited education, low and unstable incomes, and short migration durations, often moving with their families. Despite migration offering employment opportunities, the study reveals high levels of psychological distress and below-moderate quality of construction life (QoCL), particularly among women, driven by pre-migration hardships and post-migration challenges such as poor living and working conditions, job insecurity, inadequate wages, lack of social protection, and limited access to basic amenities. Consistent with existing literature, migration-related stressors, occupational hazards, and limited workplace support contribute to poor mental health and well-being. The review underscores the need for coordinated policy and public health interventions, including psychosocial support, improved housing and sanitation, access to social security and health services, pre-migration training, and community-based support systems, to reduce distress and enhance the overall quality of life of migratory construction workers.

Research Gap

Existing literature on migrant workers in India largely focuses on migration patterns, employment conditions, wage disparities, and access to social security at the national or state level, with limited emphasis on workers' subjective perceptions and quality of work life. While several studies have examined the economic contribution and vulnerabilities of migrant labour, there is a noticeable gap in empirical research that integrates perceptions, challenges, and quality of work life within a single analytical framework, particularly at the district level. Moreover, studies specific to Kerala often concentrate on labour demand or remittance behaviour, giving relatively less attention to everyday work experiences, satisfaction levels, and socio-cultural challenges faced by migrant workers.

In the context of Thrissur District, systematic empirical evidence on how migration has influenced migrant workers' quality of work life, income stability, saving behaviour, and social integration remains scarce. There is also a lack of micro-level studies using structured quantitative methods to assess satisfaction with working conditions, income adequacy, and post-migration changes in daily life. This study addresses these gaps by providing district-specific empirical insights into the perceptions and challenges of migrant workers, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their quality of work life and informing targeted policy interventions.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Migrant workers in Thrissur District form an essential part of the workforce, yet their socio-economic and workplace realities remain largely unexamined. While these workers contribute substantially to Kerala's economy, facilitating key sectors and supporting local livelihoods, they often experience inadequate remuneration, irregular employment, and insufficient social protection. In addition, many face challenges related to social integration, such as discrimination, language difficulties, and cultural differences, which can impede their well-being and productivity. Despite the growing reliance on this workforce, there is a notable scarcity of empirical studies at the district level that capture the perspectives of migrant workers regarding their working conditions, living standards, and overall quality of work life. This lack of evidence hinders the development of targeted interventions to improve their welfare, safeguard their rights, and ensure equitable access to employment and social support. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions, challenges, and quality of work life of migrant workers in Thrissur District, providing insights to inform more effective labour policies and welfare measures.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

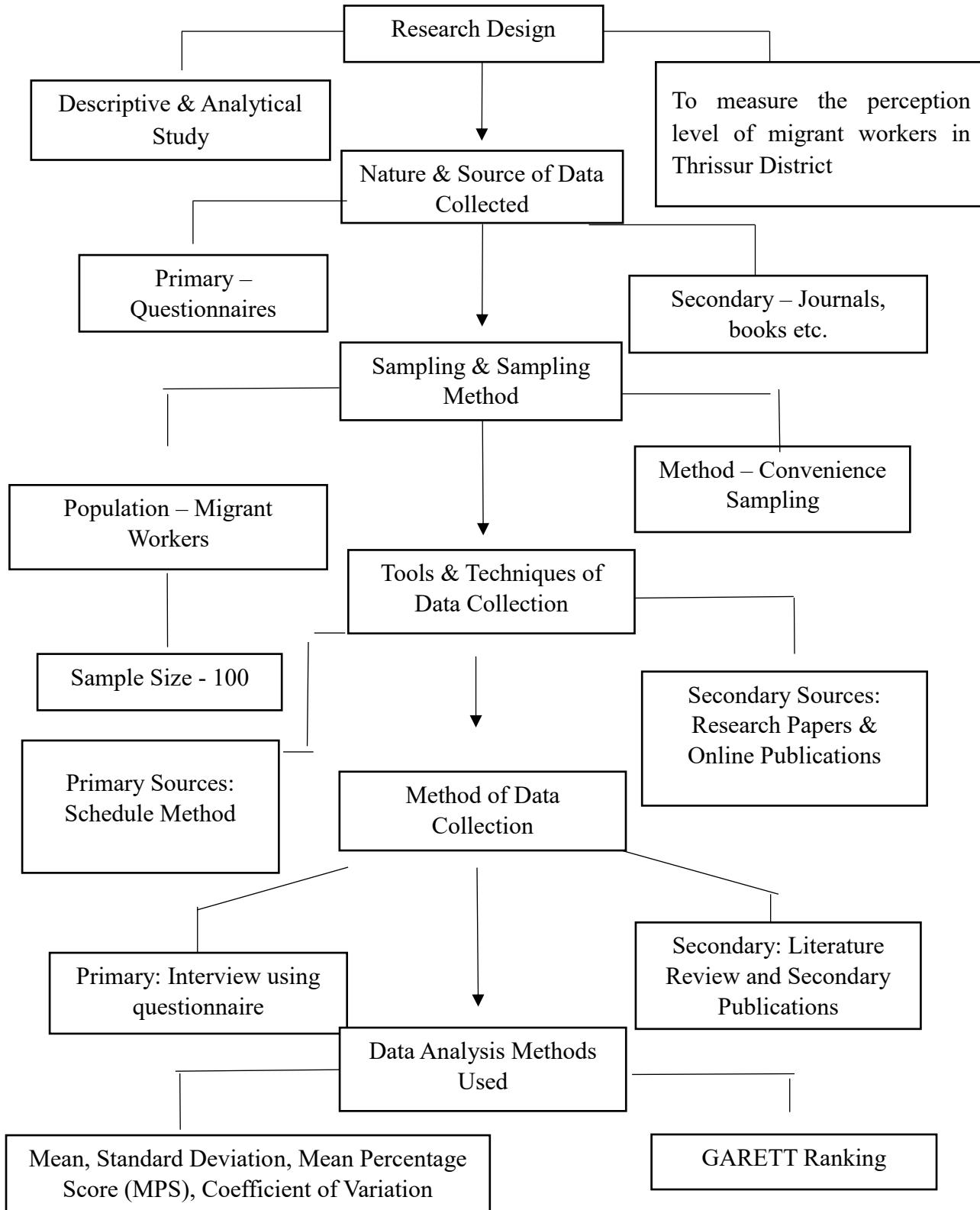
- a) To examine the demographic profile, socio-economic conditions, and working environment of migrant workers in Thrissur District.
- b) To assess the perceptions and quality of work life of migrant workers, including their satisfaction with income, employment, and living conditions.
- c) To identify the challenges and social barriers faced by migrant workers in the local community.

5. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on migrant workers in Thrissur District, Kerala, examining their demographic characteristics, socio-economic conditions, working environment, and overall quality of work life. It explores both the perceptions and lived experiences of migrant workers, including income adequacy, job stability, saving behaviour, remittance patterns, and access to welfare schemes and social security benefits. The research also analyses workplace conditions such as wage levels, working hours, occupational safety, and employer-employee relationships. In addition, it investigates the challenges migrants face within the host community, including social exclusion, cultural adjustment, language barriers, housing constraints, and access to basic services, while highlighting changes in living standards and daily routines before and after migration. The study further considers the role of government initiatives, employer support, and informal networks in shaping migrants' adaptation and well-being. The findings offer broader insights

into the structural and social dimensions of labour migration, making them relevant for policymakers, employers, trade unions, and social institutions aiming to enhance working conditions, social integration, and quality of life for migrant workers in Kerala and comparable settings.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



Source: Compiled by Researchers
Figure 1: Research Methodology Flow Chart

7. FINDINGS - QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A. Demographic Profile: The demographic profile of the respondents shows that the majority are male (64 per cent), while 36 per cent are female.

Table No.1 - Demographic distribution based on the provided data

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	64	64.0%
	Female	36	36.0%
	Total	100	100.0%
Age	20-30	42	42.0%
	30-40	53	53.0%
	40-50	4	4.0%
	Above 50	1	1.0%
	Total	100	100.0%
Marital Status	Single	58	58%
	Married	42	42%
	Total	100	100%
Education	Primary	23	23%
	10 th	37	37%
	12 th	35	35%
	Graduate	5	5%%
	Total	100	100
Employment Status	Full time	64	64%
	Part time	12	12%
	Temporary	24	24%
	Total	100	100%
Type of Field	Construction	32	32%
	Hotel	18	18%
	Textile	21	21%
	Beauty parlour	21	21%
	Automobile	5	5%
	Others	15	15%
	Total	100	100%

Source: Based on primary data

Most respondents fall within the 30–40 age group (53 per cent), followed by 20–30 years (42 per cent), indicating a predominantly young workforce. In terms of marital status, 58 per cent are single and 42 per cent are married. Educationally, a large proportion have completed secondary education, with 37 per cent having studied up to 10th standard and 35 per cent up to 12th, while only 5 per cent are graduates. Regarding employment status, 64 per cent are engaged in full-time work, with the rest in temporary or part-time jobs. Sector-wise, the highest number of respondents are employed in the construction field (32 per cent), followed by textile and beauty parlour sectors (21 per cent each), indicating concentration in labour-intensive occupations.

B. Payment, Housing, and Financial Practices of Respondents: The following table outlines the key employment, housing, and financial practices of the respondents. The table reveals that most respondents receive remuneration on a weekly basis (41 per cent), followed by daily payments (39 per cent), while only 20 per cent are paid monthly. A large majority (75 per cent) receive their wages through cash payments, indicating limited use of formal banking channels.

Table No.2 - Payment, Housing, and Financial Practices of Respondents.

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Type of Remuneration	Per day	39	39
	Per week	41	41
	Per month	20	20
	Total	100	100
Mode of Transport	Cash payment	75	75
	Bank transfer	25	25
	Total	100	100
Accommodation	Yes	72	72
	No	28	28
	Total	100	100
Spending Money on Rent	Below 1000	9	9
	1000-3000	55	55
	3000-5000	33	33
	5000-7000	3	3
	Total	100	100
Sending Money Home	Weekly	8	8
	Monthly	71	71
	Occasionally	21	21
	Total	100	100
Preferred Money Transfer	Bank transfer	47	47
	Online payment	50	50
	Through agent account	3	3
	Total	100	100
Saving Money	Monthly	56	56
	Occasionally	35	35
	Rarely	9	9
	Total	100	100

Source: Based on primary data

Most respondents (72 per cent) are provided with accommodation, and among those who spend on rent, the majority (55 per cent) spend between ₹1,000 and ₹3,000 per month. In terms of remittances, 71 per cent send money home monthly, reflecting regular financial support to families. Regarding preferred modes of money transfer, online payment (50 per cent) and bank transfer (47 per cent) are almost equally preferred. Saving behaviour shows that 56 per cent save money monthly, while 35 per cent save occasionally, indicating a moderate level of financial discipline among respondents.

C. Challenges & Differences Between Daily Life Before and After Migration: Table No. 3 presents the major challenges encountered by migrant workers within the local community and highlights the significant differences in their daily lives before and after migration. Using the Garrett Ranking Method,

the table systematically ranks key issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, experiences of discrimination, and lack of basic facilities, which affect migrants' social integration and community participation. It also captures notable changes in income levels, access to essential amenities, employment security, cultural practices, and perceptions of safety following migration. The ranking of these factors enables a clearer understanding of the relative severity of each challenge and transition experienced by migrant workers. Overall, this analysis provides valuable insights into the social and economic adjustments associated with migration and helps identify priority areas where policy interventions and support mechanisms are required to improve the living conditions and integration of migrant workers.

Table No.3 – Challenges & Differences Between Daily Life Before and After Migration

Factors	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	Total	Average score	Rank
a) Challenges Facing in the Local Community								
Language Barrier	16	44	35	5	0	5790	57.9	2
Cultural difference	16	31	43	7	3	5565	55.65	3
Discrimination	29	21	41	9	0	5845	58.45	1
Lack of facilities	4	32	46	14	4	5180	51.80	4
b) Differences Between Daily Life Before and After Migration								
Income level	26	59	9	1	5	6105	61.05	1
Access to basic amenities	17	42	36	5	0	5795	57.95	3
Security of employment	16	45	37	2	0	5830	58.30	2
Cultural practices	12	42	27	19	0	5530	55.30	5
Safety and Security	18	41	26	12	3	5665	56.65	4

Source: Based on primary data using GARETT Ranking Method

a) **Challenges Facing in the Local Community:** The above table shows the challenges faced by respondents in the local community after migration. The analysis using the Garrett Ranking method reveals that discrimination is the most significant challenge, with the highest average score of 58.45, securing the 1st rank. The next major challenge identified is language barrier, which has an average score of 57.9 and is ranked 2nd. Cultural differences also pose a notable challenge, with an average score of 55.65, placing it at the 3rd rank. The least significant challenge among the listed factors is lack of facilities, which records an average score of 51.80 and is ranked 4th. Overall, the results indicate that social and cultural issues pose greater difficulties than infrastructural limitations for the respondents.

b) **Differences Between Daily Life Before and After Migration:** The above table explains the respondents' observations regarding differences in their daily life before and after migration. Based on the Garrett Ranking method, income level emerges as the most prominent difference, with the highest average score of 61.05, securing the 1st rank. Security of employment is identified as the second major difference, with an average score of 58.30, ranking 2nd. Access to basic amenities follows with an average score of 57.95, placing it at the 3rd rank. Safety and security records an average score of 56.65 and stands at the 4th rank. Lastly, cultural practices show the least difference, with an average score of 55.30, and are ranked

5th. These findings suggest that economic and employment-related factors show the most noticeable changes in respondents' lives after migration compared to cultural aspects.

D. Level of Satisfaction: Table 4 presents the level of satisfaction of respondents across key dimensions related to their living and working conditions, namely quality of life, saving habit, working conditions, and income level. The analysis is based on primary data and uses statistical measures such as Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Mean Percentage Score (MPS), and Coefficient of Variation (CV) to assess the extent of satisfaction among respondents. These indicators provide a comprehensive understanding of respondents' perceptions of their socio-economic well-being after migration and help in identifying areas of low satisfaction that require policy and institutional intervention.

Respondents are asked to answer a set of statements in five-point Likert scale regarding various aspect of customers perception. The response is scored as 1 for "strongly Disagree", 2 for "Disagree", 3 for "Neutral", 4 for "Agree" and 5 for "Strongly agree". The mean score of each 100 respondents is found out, based on which Mean Percentage Score {MPS= (Mean score *100)/maximum possible score} is calculated. This score is classified into one of the four groups as low, if mean percent is low than 35% average if mean percent score is between 35% to 50%, good if the mean percent score lies between 50% to 75%, excellent if the mean percent score is above 75%.

Table 4 - Level of Satisfaction

No	Statement	Mean	SD*	MPS*	CV*	Level of satisfaction
a) QUALITY OF LIFE						
1	I feel that my quality of life has improved since migrating	4.06	0.48	12.18	11.82	Low
2	I plan to continue working in my current location for the foreseeable future	3.52	0.89	10.56	25.28	Low
3	I am optimistic about my financial future	3.64	0.76	10.92	20.8	Low
b) SAVING HABIT						
4	I can save a portion of my monthly income	4.54	2.06	22.7	45.3	Low
5	I save money regularly	3.25	0.95	16.25	29.2	Low
6	My savings are sufficient to cover emergencies	3.38	0.74	16.9	21.8	Low
7	I face challenges in saving money due to high living expenses	3.32	0.84	16.6	25.3	Low
8	I have good understanding of financial management and savings	3.23	0.92	16.15	28.4	Low
c) WORKING CONDITION						
9	My working hours are reasonable	3.86	0.7	19.3	18.1	Low
10	I feel safe at my workplace	3.8	0.69	19	18.15	Low
11	I have access to the necessary protective gear and equipment at work	3.51	0.65	17.5	18.5	Low
12	I receive employment benefits such as health insurance or paid leave	3.27	0.93	16.35	28.4	Low
13	My job is physically demanding	3.26	0.89	16.3	27.3	Low
d) INCOME LEVEL						
14	I'm satisfied with my current monthly income	3.67	1.39	14.68	37.8	Low

15	My income is sufficient to meet my basic needs	3.56	0.8	14.24	22.47	Low
16	I have multiple sources of income	2.78	1.01	11.12	36.3	Low
17	I receive my income on a regular and timely basis	3.5	0.9	14	25.7	Low

*Primary data. SD–Standard Deviation, MPS–Mean Percentage Score, C–Coefficient of Variation

- i. **Perception (Quality of Life):** The analysis of respondents' perception regarding quality of life indicates an overall low level of satisfaction. The statement related to improvement in quality of life since migrating records a Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of 12.18 per cent, reflecting low satisfaction among respondents. Similarly, respondents' intention to continue working in the current location shows an MPS of 10.56 per cent, indicating low satisfaction. Further, optimism about their financial future also remains low, with an MPS of 10.92 per cent. Overall, these findings suggest that respondents have a generally negative perception regarding improvements in their quality of life and future prospects.
- ii. **Saving Habit:** The saving behaviour of respondents also reflects a low level of satisfaction across all statements. Although respondents report the ability to save a portion of their monthly income, the MPS of 22.7 per cent indicates low satisfaction. Regular saving habits are similarly weak, with an MPS of 16.25 per cent. The adequacy of savings to meet emergency needs shows an MPS of 16.9 per cent, suggesting low confidence in financial security. Challenges in saving due to high living expenses are evident, as reflected by an MPS of 16.6 per cent. Additionally, respondents' understanding of financial management and savings remains limited, with an MPS of 16.15 per cent. Collectively, the results highlight inadequate saving habits and financial preparedness among respondents.
- iii. **Working Condition:** The analysis of working conditions reveals low satisfaction in all related aspects. The reasonableness of working hours records an MPS of 19.3 per cent, indicating dissatisfaction. Workplace safety perception also remains low, with an MPS of 19 per cent. Access to necessary protective gear and equipment at work shows an MPS of 17.5 per cent, reflecting insufficient safety measures. Employment benefits such as health insurance or paid leave record an MPS of 16.35 per cent, suggesting limited welfare provisions. Furthermore, the physically demanding nature of work, with an MPS of 16.3 per cent, indicates low satisfaction regarding job conditions. Overall, the findings point to unfavourable working environments for the respondents.
- iv. **Income Level:** The analysis of income-related factors indicates low satisfaction among respondents. Satisfaction with current monthly income shows an MPS of 14.68 per cent, reflecting inadequate income levels. Similarly, the sufficiency of income to meet basic needs records an MPS of 14.24 per cent, indicating financial strain. The availability of multiple sources of income is particularly low, with an MPS of 11.12 per cent, suggesting heavy reliance on a single income source. Lastly, regular and timely receipt of income records an MPS of 14 per cent, which also reflects low satisfaction. Overall, the results demonstrate that income levels and financial stability among respondents are insufficient.

8. CONCLUSION

The study highlights that migrant workers in Thrissur District are predominantly young, male, and engaged in labour-intensive sectors such as construction, textiles, and personal services. Although most respondents are employed full time and receive regular remuneration, their earnings are largely paid in cash and remain insufficient to ensure financial stability. While a fair proportion of workers save money and regularly send remittances to their families, the overall level of savings and financial preparedness is low. The findings further reveal that discrimination, language barriers, and cultural differences are the major challenges faced by migrant workers in the local community, indicating difficulties in social integration rather than access to basic facilities.

Overall, the perception of migrant workers regarding quality of life, income level, saving habits, and working conditions remains largely unfavourable. Low satisfaction levels across income adequacy, job security, workplace safety, and employment benefits suggest that migration has not significantly improved their living standards. Although economic factors such as income level and employment security show noticeable changes after migration, these improvements are limited and uneven. The study concludes that there is a need for policy interventions focusing on fair wages, safer working environments, access to social security benefits, financial inclusion, and measures to reduce discrimination, in order to improve the overall well-being and quality of life of migrant workers in the district.

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