

**WORKING CONDITIONS AND LABOUR WELFARE MEASURES IN  
THE TEA PLANTATIONS OF IDUKKI DISTRICT**

**Santhimol M. C,**  
Assistant Professor of Commerce,  
Government College, Kattappana P.O, Idukki District, Kerala, India.

**ABSTRACT**

*Indian tea industry is the second largest employment provider in our country, giving employment to more than 1.2 million labourers on a permanent basis in addition to one million labourers on a casual basis. But the tea plantation labourers is the most exploited section in this organized sector. This paper analyzes the responses of the tea plantation labourers with regard to the working conditions and labour welfare measures in the tea plantations. The responses of the labourers with regard to the working conditions and labour welfare measures are very poor. The working conditions including the quality of work life is to be improved and the working conditions are to be restructured if needed. Many of the management are not able to provide the legal welfare measures as per the PLA in the pace of increased cost of production. The government or tea board should give a little assistance towards this end and this is essential to keep the motivation of the workers and to improve their productivity.*

**Key words:** Labour welfare measures, Tea plantations, Tea plantation labourers, working conditions.

**Introduction**

Among the major tea producing countries, India has the second position by contributing 23.8 per cent share in the world tea production (KSPB, 2012). Indian tea industry is considered as the second largest employment provider, giving employment to more than 1.2 million workers on a permanent basis, in addition to one million labourers on a casual basis (TPCI, 2012). But the tea plantation labour is the most exploited one in this organized sector. They are getting very low wages, living in the dilapidated labour quarters wherein no repair and maintenance take place and getting no or insufficient medical or health care facilities as compared to other organized

sectors. Hence there is a need to study the working conditions and labour welfare measures in the tea plantations of Idukki district.

### **Review of literature**

Tea garden labourers are still in very deprived condition and are far away from urbanized society and living an isolated life (Hazarika, 2012). Tea garden workers are educationally lagging behind, health facilities are not adequate and safety measures are lacking (Parijat, 2013). The incidence of injuries was greater among male workers, those working in the field and factory and those handling multiple tasks (Joseph & Minj, 2010). The sexual harassment is prevalent in large scale estates and the formal mechanism to report cases of sexual harassment are either absent or underutilized (KHRC, 2008). Most of the workers have heard about human rights but have scanty knowledge on what exactly human rights are. As such they do not know what to do when these rights are violated (MCARER, 2008).

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To examine the responses of the labourers with regard to the working conditions in the tea plantations.
2. To analyze the responses of the labourers with regard to the legal labour welfare measures in the tea plantations.

### **Hypotheses**

1. The responses of the labourers with regard to the working conditions in the tea plantations are equal to average.
2. The responses of the labourers with regard to the labour welfare measures in the tea plantations are equal to average
3. There is no significant difference between the opinions of the labourers in the sample plantations with regard to the labour welfare measures.

### **Methodology**

The study is mainly based on both secondary and primary data sources. The secondary data is accessed from tea board, government publications, magazines and journals. The primary data is gathered from 60 tea plantation labourers in three tea plantations of Idukki district through structured interview schedule. The multistage random sampling technique is applied to

pick the samples. At the first stage, three Taluks are selected at random. Thereafter one plantation each is selected from the sample Taluks. Finally 20 labourers each are randomly selected from the sample plantations. The tools for data analysis are simple percentages, mean scores and one way analysis of variance.

### **Result and discussions**

The table 1 shows the profile of the sample tea labourers. 60 per cent of the labourers are females, belonging to the age category of 40 to 50 years (37 per cent), having no formal education (52 per cent), married (80 per cent), with a daily income in between 350 and 500 rupees.

**Table 1 Profile of the sample labourers**

Respondent's characteristics	Number of respondents (n=60)	Percentage
<i>Gender:</i>		
Male	24	40
Female	36	60
<i>Age:</i>		
Below 30 years	6	10
30-40 years	15	25
40-50 years	22	37
Above 50 years	17	28
<i>Marital status:</i>		
Single	12	20
Married	48	80
<i>Level of education:</i>		
No formal education	31	52
Primary	24	40
Secondary	5	8
<i>Level of income:</i>		
Below Rs.350 per day	17	28
350-500	33	55
Above Rs.500	10	17

Source: survey data

Tea industry is a labour intensive industry and the availability of adequate man power is a major pre-request for the growth of such industry. Majority of them are not local or they are migrant workers. In such situation the responses of the labourers about the working conditions in the

plantation is analyzed. The working condition of the tea plantation labourers are examined by looking into eight variables. The labourers were asked to give their response about these eight variables on a five point Likert's scale. The five different response options are very low, low, average, high and very high.

On completion of the interview of all the sample respondents, the respective scores applicable to each of the responses were assigned and fed into the computer. Based on this, the summated score of each factor for every respondent is calculated. From the summated score of all the 60 sample respondents, the sample mean (mean score) of each factor with respect to the sub variables were arrived at. Then the central value applicable to the factor was calculated by applying the formula  $(\text{number of variables} \times 5 + \text{the number of variables} \times 1) / 2$ . The mean score obtained for each factor was compared with the central value applicable to the factor to check whether the two values were significantly different or not. The result revealed the collective view of all the respondents about the particular factor.

A sample mean equal to or nearer to the central value represents an “average or neutral” state of affairs regarding the factor under evaluation. A sample mean greater than the central value indicates good or excellent/ satisfied or highly satisfied situation where as the sample mean less than the central value indicates very poor or poor/not at all satisfied or not satisfied situation. Table:2 shows the criteria for comparison of the sample mean and the central value in case of working conditions.

**Table 2 Criteria for comparison – working conditions**

<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Opinion about working conditions</i>
Below 12 (Q1)	Very poor
Above 12 (Q1) but significantly below 24 (Q2)	Poor
In the neighborhood of 24 (Q2)	Average
Significantly above 24 (Q2) but below 36(Q3)	Good
Above 36 (Q3)	Very good

Source: compiled by the researcher

**Table 3 Mean score and central value- working conditions**

<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Central value</i>	<i>Overall response</i>
11.07(less than Q1)	24	Very poor

Source: compiled from the survey data

From the above table 3, it is clear that the mean score of the response with respect to the working condition is 11.07. This is significantly below 12 (i.e Q1). Hence it is concluded that the overall response of the labourers regarding working conditions is very low. Therefore the hypothesis formed at the outset viz., the responses of the labourers with regard to the working conditions in the tea plantations is equal to average, is rejected.

Since the majority of the labourers are staying in the labour quarters provided by the management, the management has to comply with certain labour welfare measures as per the plantation labour Act. In such situation, the responses of the labourers about the labour welfare measures of the management are analyzed. The labour welfare measures of the management are analyzed with eight variables. The labourers were asked to give their response about these eight variables on a five point Likert's scale. Here also the means score of the responses was compared with the central value applicable to the factor to check whether there is any difference between the two if any. The result revealed the collective view of all the respondents about the labour welfare measures. The following table shows the criteria for comparing mean score and central value in case of labour welfare measures.

**Table 4 Criteria for comparison – labour welfare measures**

<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Opinion about labour welfare measures</i>
Below 12 (Q1)	Very poor
Above 12 (Q1) but significantly below 24 (Q2)	Poor
In the neighborhood of 24 (Q2)	Average
Significantly above 24 (Q2) but below 36(Q3)	Good
Above 36 (Q3)	Very good

Source: compiled by the researcher

**Table 5 Mean score and central value- labour welfare measures**

<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Central value</i>	<i>Overall response</i>
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17.29(less than Q1)	24	Poor
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Source: compiled from the survey data

From the above table 5, it is clear that the mean score of the response with respect to the working condition is 17.29. This is significantly above 12 (i.e Q1) but significantly below 24 (i.e Q2). Hence it is concluded that the overall response of the labourers regarding labour welfare measures is poor. Therefore the hypothesis formed at the outset viz., the responses of the labourers with regard to the labour welfare measures in the tea plantations is equal to average, is rejected.

An attempt was also made to see whether the labourers in the sample plantations differ significantly as regards their opinion about the labour welfare measures. For this purpose, one way analysis of variance was applied. The hypothesis formed in this regard and the test result is given below:

*Ho: The labourers in the sample plantations do not differ significantly as regards their opinion about the labour welfare measures.*

*Ha: The labourers in the sample plantations differ significantly as regards their opinion about the labour welfare measures.*

**Table: 6**

**Means of labour welfare measures**

Variables	Plantations		
	Vallardie estates	Vagamon Plantations Ltd	Chinnar Estates Ltd
1. Child development measures	3.01	2.92	2.83
2. Protective measures	2.62	2.01	1.98
3. Health & sanitation	2.13	1.92	1.84
4. Entertainment measures	1.96	1.85	1.83
5. Basic amenities	2.03	2.06	2.01
6. Cost saving	2.13	2.72	2.14

measures			
7. Cost free measures	2.52	2.03	2.08
8. Maintenance measures	2.23	2.10	1.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.24</b>	<b>17.61</b>	<b>16.02</b>

Source: compiled by the researcher

**Table: 7**  
**Test Statistics**

Plantations	Mean	SD	F-Value	P. value
Vallardie Estates	18.24	8.54	0.182	0.762
Vagamom Plantations Ltd	17.61	7.94		
Chinnar Estate Ltd	16.02	7.64		

Source: compiled by the researcher

From table: 7, it is clear that the p- value is greater than 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis (Ho) is accepted at five percent level of significance. The conclusion is that, there is no significant difference between the opinions of the labourers in the sample plantations with regard to the labour welfare measures.

### **Conclusion**

The labourers are considered as the backbone of the tea plantations since it is a labour intensive industry. But the opinion of the workers with regard to the working conditions and labour welfare measures is very poor. The labourers are spending half of their life at the tea plantations. Therefore the working conditions including the quality of working life is to be improved at the possible level. The working conditions are to be re-structured if needed. None of the management is implementing the legal welfare measures as specifically mentioned in the PLA. This is because that many of the plantations are struggling to run the plantations in the pace of increased cost of production. So the government or tea board should give little assistance to the plantations towards this end so that the standard of living of the workers can be up lifted. It is essential to keep the motivation of the workers and to improve their productivity.

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