

Impact of Covid-19 on Labourers in India

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ABSTRACT:

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in India brought about unprecedented challenges to the nation's economy and labour force. This abstract delves into the substantial impact of the pandemic on the realm of labourers within the Indian context. Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted the need for a re-evaluation of essential workers' rights, as they became frontline warriors in the battle against the virus. Occupational safety and health standards took centre stage, emphasizing the imperative of a safe working environment for all employees. Simultaneously, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in the workplace, leading to a surge in remote work arrangements. This shift necessitated adaptations in labour laws to accommodate the unique challenges and opportunities associated with the virtual workspace.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed a profound transformation in India's labour laws, prompting a re-examination of worker rights, job security, and workplace safety. The crisis also spurred the integration of technology in employment practices, requiring legal frameworks to keep pace with evolving work dynamics. As India navigates the post-pandemic era, a balanced and forward-thinking approach to labour law reform will be essential to ensure a resilient and equitable workforce.

Keyword: COVID, WFH (Work from home), WLB (Work life balance)

INTRODUCTION:

In 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic caused disruptions to the global labour markets. The short-term effects were abrupt and frequently dire: millions of people lost their jobs or were placed on furlough; others quickly adapted to working from home when businesses shuttered. Numerous additional employees were judged necessary, so they carried on working in hospitals, supermarkets, garbage trucks, and warehouses while according to new measures designed to stop the spread of the unusual coronavirus. This page provides a brief explanation of the workers' circumstances during COVID-19, the issues they encountered, and how they overcame them.

The pandemic prompted a paradigm shift in the traditional employment landscape, necessitating rapid legislative responses. Government interventions included relaxations in compliance requirements, temporary amendments in work hours and wages, and the introduction of remote work policies. However, these measures also raised critical questions concerning worker rights, job security, and social protection. This article briefly explains the circumstances which was faced by the labourers and the Indian economy at the time of COVID.

HISTORY OF COVID-19:

The global crisis which was never seen before sparked by the COVID-19 epidemic. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, abruptly declared a "total lockdown" for the 1.4 billion people living there on March 24, 2020. The majority of workers in India are employed by small and medium-sized enterprises, which closed

their doors. At least 120 million workers, or 45% of India's non-agricultural sector, lost their employment as a result of the shutdown. Employers were not required by law or morality to compensate their employees, many of whom were not even paid for overtime. A number of the laborers were evicted from their homes in the shantytowns, leaving them with nothing more than a few days' supply of food in hand. In response to public outcry and the potential for hundreds of millions of people to go hungry as a result of this impromptu lockdown, the government on March 26th unveiled a pitiful aid package worth less than 1% of India's GDP. The lockdown revealed the vulnerability of the Indian working class, since it just took a slight prod to drive large segments of the labour force into hunger and homelessness.

COVID'S IMPACT ON DAILY WORKERS:

The traumatic lockdown days had a significant impact on the Indian economy as a whole. Unfamiliar conditions have had an impact on a wide range of businesses, including tourism, hotels, transit, automobile, electronics, textiles, film, and even agriculture. It is disturbing and dangerous to see, however, that the closing days have drastically altered the standard of living for those who are part of the wage worker society, to the point that they now have to wait all day for something as simple as a cup of tea. This research is the outcome of understanding that specific set of people's standard of living, the daily wage workers who are reliant on their paycheques. Wage workers have access to jobs in building construction labour, vegetable vendors on the footpath, house repair, dry cleaning, cooking, barbering, cleaning tea stalls, mechanical workshops, supermarkets, and retail businesses in the market that employ people who carry heavy loads. However, the periods of confinement completely locked off all of those locations, leaving day laborers without access to basic necessities like food, cash, or medicine, much alone childcare.

MIGRANT WORKERS:

Indian migrant laborers encountered numerous challenges within the COVID-19 outbreak. Millions of migrant workers had to cope with food shortages, unemployment, and lost wages as a result of the country's lockdown, which closed companies and workplaces. Many of them went hungry after this, along with their families. With no other way to get home because of the lockdown, thousands of people started to walk there. According to a research, during the first wave of Covid-19-led lockdowns, 43.3 million interstate migrants went back home; of these, about 35 million walked or took other non-traditional forms of transportation. The Central and State Governments responded by offering them assistance in a number of ways, including setting up transportation. 198 migrant laborers lost their lives as a result of traffic accidents during the lockdown. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, (1979) aimed at the welfare of migrant labourers.

WORK FROM HOME:

Millions of workers across the globe worked from home (WFH) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many employees and businesses were forced to abruptly and unpreparedly transition to remote work for the first time as a result of the pandemic. Like any organizational reform, WFH has its benefits and drawbacks. Adopting this flexible work arrangement has typically been portrayed as a deliberate decision that calls for planning, preparation, and adjustment in order to enable employers to better support workers' productivity and give them a better work-life balance.

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled the majority of businesses to embrace this mode of operation, frequently without equipping staff members with the abilities needed for remote work. As was already noted, research has shown that working remotely has both benefits and drawbacks. Thus, a lot of research has been done on its effects. Conversely, it is critical to investigate the impact of WFH as a "new way of working" on the productivity and well-being of workers who have never worked remotely before, as well as to pinpoint the particular workplace circumstances that made working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic difficult.

ADVANTAGES OF COVID WORKERS:

Due to the overall lockdown all over the country, the workers are supposed to work from home to complete their work assigned by their head and to meet their financial crisis. There are some benefits arising out of work from home, they are;

➤ **Enhanced performance and productivity:**

Telecommuting typically results in fewer meetings, less office politics, lower noise levels, and fewer interruptions. When you take away the need for a commute, remote workers usually have more time and fewer interruptions, which increases productivity.

When implemented properly, remote work frees up both individuals and employers to concentrate on what matters most: performance. Sadly, bias and partiality can result from "false positives" that the office setting might provide. After example, although arriving early and departing late may "appear" to be more productive, actual output is a far better measure of output.

➤ **Benefits in terms of money:**

Half-time remote workers can save a lot of money. Gas, auto upkeep, transportation, parking costs, a business suit, out-of-pocket lunches, and other expenses can all be completely cut out of your budget. Your pocket is refilled with extra money as a result of these saves.

Furthermore, the savings apply to more than just employees. Significant long-term cost savings will also be realized by the increasing number of businesses like Twitter, Square, Shopify, and Facebook, to mention a few that permit employees to continue working remotely after the outbreak.

➤ **Improved Work-Life Balance:**

Employees who work from home can benefit from a better work-life balance since they can now use the time they would have spent commuting for themselves, which is the first step toward achieving it. Employees have more free time in the evenings because they can incorporate home tasks into their workday, such as loading or emptying the dishwasher or making dinner during their lunch break. They have plenty of time to spend with their family as well. They can more easily manage their work and family lives when they work from home, which also makes their jobs easier and less stressful.

➤ **Location Independence:**

Having access to a wider choice of career options that aren't restricted by geographic location is one of the many advantages of telecommuting. For job seekers who reside in small towns and rural areas where there might not be many local jobs accessible, this might be extremely beneficial. Since they don't have a fixed place of employment, totally remote workers were able to move and lead nomadic lives prior to the epidemic and yet have fulfilling careers. Even if living completely nomadic is presently on hold till borders start to open, it's still a benefit.

Individuals who are required to relocate regularly, like wives of military personnel, might also reap advantages from working remotely as they won't have to start from scratch every time they move to a new

location. Furthermore, working remotely is a terrific method to escape high-rent and high-mortgage places, particularly for occupations that used to demand residing in a high-cost metropolis, like tech. You can now have a career you love and not have to live close to a big city if you work remotely. (See jobs you can do from anywhere).

➤ **Technology makes it easier:**

Staff members can now stay in constant communication with the office thanks to the internet. Communication between teams and coworkers has been lot easier thanks to tools like Skype, which can also occasionally result in more productive and successful meetings. This allows people to attend meetings on time, and some may even feel more comfortable speaking on the phone than in person. Subject-related presentations can be made using a computer through a Powerpoint presentation program.

DISADVANTAGES OF COVID WORKERS:

At the same time of work from home many employees faced a lot of problems to work during COVID. The problems faced by them are,

➤ **Family Distractions:**

When working remotely, a lot of people especially women are sidetracked by their kids. While working from home might help reduce workplace distractions, it can also make it easier for workers to become sidetracked by family members or other domestic disturbances if they don't have a peaceful enough workspace.

It's crucial to inform your family members when you have work commitments that prevent you from being available. It is essential to have a completely furnished office in a different part of the house, with a door you can close when needed. Also keep in mind that your home office may not be the best area for young children or dogs to play.

➤ **Technical Issue:**

Working remotely can be more difficult if you don't have the necessary equipment at home, have a sporadic or weak Wi-Fi connection, or simply run into regular tech problems. In the FlexJobs study, 28% of participants reported having trouble with technology, and 26% voiced concerns about dependable Wi-Fi. Even though technical issues can arise in offices, they are typically simpler to resolve when assistance is available.

It's worth asking your company if they can supply you better equipment. Investing in high-quality technology is undoubtedly worthwhile if you operate your own firm. Even if working remotely with a tech support team isn't always as effective as in-person communication, it can frequently function.

➤ **Isolation:**

People who work from home sometimes experience a sense of alienation from their coworkers and the company as a whole, something that an office setting inherently fosters. Employers could make sure that there is more frequent communication to solve this problem. Therefore, employees are given additional opportunities to feel engaged and a part of the team by setting up quick phone catch-ups or regular team meetings using other technologies like Teams, Skype, or Zoom. Increasing casual get-togethers and social interactions will also aid in reducing feelings of loneliness.

➤ **Working from home doesn't suit everyone:**

Not everyone is cut out for working from home, either in terms of aptitude or disposition. It's possible that some workers enjoy the structure and routine that come with working in an office setting. Some employees could find that face-to-face coaching from their manager is very helpful in assisting them in finishing

duties and reaching their objectives, and they may also prefer personal engagement with their coworkers. Employees who have disabilities should also be taken into consideration. Getting the help they require to perform their job may suffer if they work from home. Additionally, not everyone's home life can coexist with working from home. For example, some people may have young children who may not understand limits and disrupt their workday. Some might lack the room needed to set up a functional dedicated workspace.

➤ **More Difficult to Manage Work Relationships and Collaborate:**

Even with all of the online communication tools and collaborative capabilities that technology has provided, in-person interaction is still preferable in many situations. With online collaboration capabilities, individuals seated around a table examining drawings could be able to solve an issue in minutes that would take days.

Furthermore, interacting with coworkers and having sensitive conversations in person might be considerably easier than over video chat. Misinterpreting hints or stepping on each other's words is simpler when communicating via electronic means.

When employees work from home, it may be difficult for them to distinguish between business and personal life, as opposed to an office where there is an obvious physical divide. Employees may find it difficult to decide when to stop working as a result, which could result in longer workdays, more stress, and eventually burnout. Employers ought to remind employees of the value of taking time off and urge them to take regular breaks.

REDUCTION IN SALARY:

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused most of us to see less family and friends and have had less in-person interactions with our coworkers; but, for many of us, it has also resulted in smaller paycheques. Given that more people than ever before work from home, workers may be open to suggestions from their managers that their pay should be reduced in light of the fact that they are no longer responsible for paying for meals and travel expenses. Soon after the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, Zoom calls and antibacterial gel dispensers joined the ranks of the new employment environment. These were dubbed "pandemic payouts"

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INDIAN ECONOMY:

Since the Great Depression, one of the worst job crises ever has been brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis poses a serious risk of exacerbating poverty and expanding inequality, with long-term effects. Currently, nations must do every effort to prevent this employment problem from developing into a societal one. It is imperative to rebuild a stronger and more resilient labour market as an investment in the future and in coming generations.

The Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation issued official figures indicating that during the April-June quarter of this fiscal year, the Indian GDP shrank by 7.3%. Since the ministry began assembling GDP statistics on a quarterly basis in 1996, this decline represents the worst one to date. Following the lockdown, an estimated 10 million migrant laborers went back to their home countries in 2020. Surprisingly, though, was the lack of information held by both the federal and state governments on the migrant laborers who perished and lost their jobs during the lockdown.

The government did more than only put in place a digitally controlled database system; it also provided assistance to migrant workers who fled to their home countries during the second wave of the hurricane.

The Indian economy's pre-existing vulnerabilities had been severely uncovered and exacerbated by the second wave of COVID-19. With the exception of a few critical services and operations, India's \$2.9 trillion economy was closed during the shutdown. Due to the closure of stores, restaurants, factories, transportation companies, and other commercial buildings, the lockdown severely slowed down the economy. The global epidemic had the greatest impact on the unorganized economy. In India, the GDP decrease from April to June may have exceeded 8% if one takes into account the unorganized sector.

According to polls done by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, during the April–June quarter of 2021, unemployment rates rose sharply, ranging from 7.9% to 12%. MSMEs closing their doors is a knock-on impact of the economy. Millions of jobs have been permanently eliminated, which has reduced consumer spending.

JUDICIAL INTERPRETATIONS:

The crisis was unnoticed by the Indian Supreme Court. In response to a petition submitted by Alakh Alok Srivastava, a labour law specialist at Indian Law Institute, the government stated that 2.2 million migrant workers received food and 600,000 were housed in government shelters. The millions of other migrant laborers who were left stranded on the streets across the nation were not taken into consideration by the court. In a statement, the Solicitor General stated that "not a single migrant was walking" as of March 31, 2020, at 11 a.m. Even while reports of migrant workers becoming lost on the streets were coming in from all over the nation, the Supreme Court agreed to these assertions. Thus, while the majority of labour regulations were being suspended by the states, the Supreme Court and the Executive chose to ignore these issues.

The High Courts, however, addressed the situation of laborers in a more suitable manner. The State Administration was censured by the Karnataka High Court for obtaining train fees from the labourers. In order to comply with the national policy of enabling "a migrant worker who has no income and is not in a position to pay railway fare" to return home, it requested confirmation from the State Government to the Court. Tents for homeless migrants are to be erected, per the directives of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. Due to the lack of midday meals, children from lower social classes, notably children of labourers, are suffering. The Patna High Court took suo moto cognizance of this issue.

POST COVID:

The global labour market disruptions that had led to multiple experiments with flexible work schedules, remote employment, and new connections to centralized working environments must be addressed in the post-pandemic recovery. Regarding the long-term diagnosis, however, there was disagreement over whether the world is experiencing a massive disruption that would give rise to a "new normal," with governments and researchers speculating about a wide range of possible "new normal" future states of the world. Alternatively, the coronavirus disease was thought to be a singular catastrophe, after which the workplace would revert to its "old normal" pre-coronavirus disease state. These shifts raised questions about what the post-pandemic world would look like in terms of the new normal and what may be anticipated, especially in the workplace.

This article aims to explain how changes in work practices have been brought about by coronavirus sickness. Examining the effects of the coronavirus disease both good and bad on the labour market and Work Life Balance (WLB) is the goal. Second, the article illustrates potential trends and orientations by drawing a picture of the "new normal" following the coronavirus epidemic, the future labour market's

likely makeup, and what WLB would entail. Three categories can be used to group these trends: acceleration, normalization, and remodelling. Acceleration is the term used to describe developments that were already occurring in the workplace but were given a higher trajectory due to the particular circumstances of the epidemic. The term "normalization" refers to the broad acceptance and use of behaviours that were previously thought to be the exclusive domain of an elite group of people or to be unusual and infrequently employed. Remodelling is the process of bringing the pre-COVID setup up to date with the changes brought forth by the epidemic.

CONCLUSION:

The impact of COVID-19 on labourers in India has been profound and far-reaching, reshaping the socio-economic landscape in unprecedented ways. With the imposition of lockdowns and restrictions to curb the spread of the virus, millions of daily-wage laborers found themselves grappling with sudden unemployment and economic uncertainty. The informal sector, which constitutes a significant portion of India's workforce, bore the brunt of the crisis, as jobs in construction, agriculture, and small businesses dwindled. The lack of a social safety net exacerbated the challenges, leaving many laborers without financial support or access to healthcare. Additionally, the migration crisis witnessed during the lockdown, as scores of workers sought to return to their hometowns, highlighted the vulnerabilities inherent in the system. As India strives to recover, addressing the long-term impacts on laborers necessitates not only economic revitalization but also the implementation of comprehensive social welfare measures to build resilience and ensure the well-being of the workforce in the face of future crises.

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