

Health Status of Women Labourers in Some Tea Plantations of Titabar Area of Jorhat District, Assam

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Introduction :

Tea is the most important plantation industry in India in terms of domestic consumption as well as export. India is the second largest producer of tea after China. Tea is a monoculture practice preferably in the hilly areas as well as in elevated areas with proper sloping. The total area under tea plantation in the country is 563980 hectares which produces over 1200 million Kg of tea annually (Sarma 2015). The industry directly employs more than one million workers on permanent or casual basis of which more than half of the employees are women (Bosumatari and Goyari 2013). In Assam tea plantation is more than a century old practice started by the British. As it is a privately owned plantation based industry, it gives the utmost priority to profit generation, neglecting the human factor including life conditions, sanitation, health security etc. Therefore, in most of the tea plantations the health status of the women labourers is very poor.

According to WHO 'Health' is the state of complete physical, mental and social well being not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Park 1970). The health status of tea garden women workers can be analysed in relation to nutritional deficiency diseases, infectious diseases, and physical and psychological health problems (Balagopal 1990). Most common drudgeries are physical strain and backache due to the hard work in scorching sun, head load transportation and continuous standing. The women labourers have to take strenuous roles which give rise to extreme fatigue. Most of the problems like malnutrition, anaemia, extreme fatigue, peeling of the skin, rough hair, etc. are the problems occurring due to heavy manual work, extreme climatic conditions, unavailability of nutritious food and proper health facilities (Venkatatesan 1995). They also suffer other health problems like respiratory problems, chest pain, and skin diseases. During the summer season the women quite often suffer from diarrhoea, fever, gastroenteritis, cholera, malarial fever, etc. Moreover, in tea gardens, improper sanitation and housing conditions cause many infectious diseases. They do not have compartments in

their household, hence lack of privacy. Again, improper lighting, ventilation, drinking water and toilet facility also affect their health (Tinker 1994). This paper tries to find out health related problems faced by the women workers in tea plantations of Titabar area of Jorhat District, Assam.

Objective :

- i) To study some health related problems
- ii) To study some aspects of the housing conditions

Materials and Method :

To fulfil the above stated objectives 100 married women of age below 45 years working in tea plantation were randomly selected. The selected tea gardens were Kharikatiya Bagan, Bokahola Bagan and Duklingiya Bagan. The information was collected by direct interviewing and the data were analysed by using percentage analysis.

Results and Discussion :

Deficiency symptoms present in women tea labourers :

Extreme fatigue is one of the most common problems faced by women labourers of tea plantations. About 98% of them suffer from extreme fatigue, whereas 57% suffer from malnutrition and 59.55% are anaemic. Peeling of the skin is a very common problem faced by 67.50% of females due to high exposure to sun light during leaf plucking. Rough hair, eye strain and menstruation problem are also faced by more than 62% of the women labourers.

Infectious diseases :

Common infectious diseases suffered by the female folk of tea plantations are respiratory diseases, intestinal infections, skin diseases and malaria. Respiratory problems such as breathing problems, chest pain, frequent common cold, pneumonia and general fever is faced by 46.50%, 62.50%, 84%, 70% and 83.50% respectively. All these problems are believed to be raised from various environmental factors like dust, insecticides and pesticides used in the plantation, smoke generated during cooking in wood fire, lack of warm clothing during winters, carrying of heavy load during leaf plucking, etc. Again unhygienic condition and lack of knowledge about health and hygiene leads them to suffer from intestinal diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and helminthes infection, which are being suffered by 57.50%, 25.50% and 60.50% respectively. 46% skin infection and 31% prevalence of malaria was observed in the studied area.

Physical and psychological health problems :

The parameters which were included under physical health are physical stress, muscle pain, backache, leg pain and bleeding digits; where 100% of the sample individuals had to face those physical problems. During the study two psychological parameters were also included, which were short temperament and feeling of insecurity which were faced by 39% and 24% of the respondents respectively.

Housing conditions of the women labourers :

During the study it was found that 66% of the females did not have proper toilet facility. Lack of water supply (88%) and lack of bathroom (93%) are the major problems faced by the female tea garden workers. Plantation Labourer act 1951 has a provision for proper water supply within the garden premises by the authority, which should be at least one tube well in each residential line. But it was not found to be followed in the studied area. Other problems like lack of privacy (60.50%), proper lighting and ventilation (62.50% and 64%), leaking roofs during rains (84.50%) are also prevailing in the studied tea gardens.

Conclusion :

The tea plantation of Assam mainly depend upon the women labourers. The working women have to perform dual roles; as home maker as well as a daily wage earner. In the plantation sector they must work for eight hours a day at a very low rate which is not sufficient for affording proper nutritional diet, leading to malnutrition. Though the Minimum Wage Act, 1948 has been implemented by the Government of India to fix the minimum rate of wage, but it varies from area to area, whereas the price of the essential commodities are almost same all over the country. Moreover, very low literacy rate (39.7%), (Bosumatari and Goyari 2013); lack of awareness towards healthy life, superstitious belief, male dominance, etc. are prevailing problems amongst the tea plantation workers. Though psychological problems are less than the physical problems and infectious diseases, yet they should not be neglected by the authorities, as proper mental health is very much essential to lead a healthy life. Therefore, it can be concluded that the tea garden women workers covered by the survey posses poor health status, who were bound for over working with poor dietary conditions.

Table : Health related problems and housing conditions of women labourers of tea plantations of Titabar area of Jorhat

Percentage (%) of Deficiency symptoms present in women tea labourers :

Deficiency Parameter	Eye strain	Anaemia	Menstrual problem	Peeling of skin	Extreme fatigue	Malnutrition
Kharikatiya Bagan,	55.00	60.00	62.00	65.00	98.00	58.00
Bokahola Bagan	70.00	58.00	63.00	70.00	98.00	56.00
Duklingiya Bagan	63.00	61.00	64.00	66.00	96.00	59.00
Mean	62.67	59.67	63.00	67.00	97.33	57.67
SD(±)	7.51	1.53	1.00	2.65	1.15	1.53
Confidence Level (95.0%)	18.64	3.79	2.48	6.57	2.87	3.79

Percentage (%) of Infectious diseases present in women tea labourers :

Disease type	Breathing problem	Chest pain	Common cold	Pneumonia	Diarhoea	Cholera	Helminthes infection	General fever	Skin diseases	Malaria
Kharikatiya Bagan,	25.00	53.00	84.00	77.00	60.00	28.00	65.00	83.00	43.00	43.00
Bokahola Bagan	68.00	72.00	84.00	63.00	54.00	23.00	56.00	84.00	49.00	19.00
Duklingiya Bagan	47.00	60.00	81.00	69.00	58.00	25.00	62.00	81.00	44.00	21.00
Mean	46.67	61.67	83.00	69.67	57.33	25.33	61.00	82.67	45.33	27.67
SD(±)	21.50	9.61	1.73	7.02	3.06	2.52.00	4.58	1.53	3.21	13.32
Confidence Level (95.0%)	53.41	23.87	4.30	17.45	7.59	6.25	11.38	3.79	7.99	33.08

Percentage (%) of Physical and psychological health problems of the women tea labourers:

Physical & Psychological Problem	Physical Stress	Muscle Pain	Backache	Leg Pain	Bleeding digits	Short temperament	Feeling insecurity
Kharikatiya Bagan,	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	53.00	28.00
Bokahola Bagan	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	25.00	20.00
Duklingiya Bagan	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	31.00	23.00
Mean	100.67	100.67	100.67	100.67	100.67	36.33	23.67
SD(±)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.74	4.04
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	36.62	10.04

Percentage (%) of problems related to Housing conditions of the women tea labourers :

Housing Condition	Lack of privacy	Lack of lighting	Lack of ventilation	Lack of sanitation	Lack of water supply	Lack of bathroom	Leaking roofs
Kharikatiya Bagan,	35.00	39.00	42.00	46.00	83.00	93.00	83.00
Bokahola Bagan	86.00	86.00	86.00	86.00	93.00	93.00	86.00
Duklingiya Bagan	48.00	52.00	42.00	39.00	61.00	85.00	75.00
Mean	56.33	59.00	56.67	57.00	79.00	90.33	81.33
SD(±)	26.50	24.27	25.40	25.36	16.37	4.62	5.69
Confidence Level (95.0%)	65.83	60.29	63.11	62.99	40.67	11.47	14.13

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