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A STUDY ON LIVELIHOOD STATUS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the livelihood status of agricultural labourers in Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu. The study is based on primary data collected from 400 agricultural labourers. The study employed descriptive research design, simple random sampling is used to select samples, and the data are collected through questionnaire, which is distributed directly among the agricultural labourers. Percentage analysis is used to describe the socio-economic profile, while factor analysis identified major factors influencing their livelihood standing, including economic stability, employment conditions, social background, living conditions, health and welfare, and infrastructure facilities. Multiple linear regression analysis showed that economic stability and employment conditions have strong influence on improving the livelihood of agricultural labourers. In addition, one-sample t-test disclosed major challenges such as low wages, seasonal unemployment, and limited access to basic services. Findings indicated that improving income opportunities, employment stability, and access to welfare measures is essential for enhancing the overall socio-economic condition of agricultural labourers.

KEY WORDS: Livelihood Status, Agricultural Labourers, Economic Stability, Employment Conditions, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

India is the world's largest and second most populous nation. However, a large portion of the population has been living in an unstable economic environment as a result of the agricultural sector's employment options not keeping up with the rapidly growing population. In financial revenue of economy, agriculture holds significant portion in terms of employment and output. For Indian farmers, it is both a fundamental trade and a form of social heritage and way of life. Leading industries including cotton, sugar, jute, tobacco, and plantations directly depend on agriculture, which is the foundation of the Indian economy (Karpagam and

Mariappan, 2025). Industrial products like tractors and other machinery are essential to the development of agricultural products. The economic and social standing of agricultural workers in rural communities is referred to as their livelihood status. The economic performance indicators consist of income, education level, occupation, family structure, living circumstances, and access to basic amenities are frequently used to measure the means of support of population including agricultural labourers (Mamathalakshmi et al., 2025). A significant portion of the rural workforce consists of agricultural laborers, who mostly depend on wage jobs to survive. The living circumstances of agricultural laborers frequently reflect lack of resources and opportunity for development. The majority of agricultural labor is seasonal in nature and their income earning capacity is also highly limited. During the planting and harvesting seasons, laborers may receive regular pay, but during the off-season, they may experience underemployment or unemployment (Pushpalatha, 2025).

Financial instability, inadequate savings, and reliance on unofficial credit sources are the results of this erratic revenue pattern. They are less likely to change careers if they have limited access to education, which keeps their wage levels low over time. Agricultural laborers are members of the economically disadvantaged segments of society in many rural places (Yoganandham, 2021). The ability of agricultural laborers to make money is constrained by their lack of land ownership and restricted access to productive assets. Inadequate housing conditions, poor sanitation, and restricted access to clean drinking water are common. They are highly exposed to work in sunlight, rain and even bad weather conditions. Furthermore, agriculture is a low income yielding business. The farmers are experiencing much difficulty to preserve crop along with their seasonal labourers (Janaki and Periyasamy, 2020). The standard of living of agricultural laborers is further impacted by health problems and inadequate medical facilities. It is typical for people to migrate to neighboring villages or cities in search of work, which makes family stability more difficult. Various government initiatives have been implemented to enhance the working conditions of farm laborers by providing welfare assistance and job prospects (Kumar and Singh, 2022). However, different regions have different levels of awareness and access to these programs. A precise evaluation of livelihood position aids in determining the challenges encountered by agricultural laborers. Development of suitable policies to raise their income, standard of living, and general quality of life is made easier with the use of such study.

Life of Agricultural Labours: Daily wage work, seasonal employment, and restricted access to steady income sources typically characterize the lives of agricultural laborers in rural locations. The majority of laborers rely on farming tasks that are only available during particular agricultural seasons, such as plowing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting. The agricultural labourers are mostly engaged in paddy, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables and other season based cultivations. Agricultural labourers are experienced about unemployment or are compelled to look for other low-paying physical labor job to support their family during off-seasons. The capacity of agricultural labourers to preserve money or enhance their living conditions is hampered by this erratic revenue pattern, which also causes financial insecurity (Patel, 2016). Agricultural laborers are frequently come from households with lower incomes, low levels of education, and few other employment options. There is large number of agricultural labourers put in long hours in physically taxing environments, frequently without the necessary facilities or safety precautions. The agricultural labourers are typically dwell in substandard housing with little access to sanitary facilities, potable water, and medical treatment. Due to reliance on unofficial borrowing amid financial hardships, debt is also prevalent. Agricultural laborers are essential to the rural economy and food production system despite these obstacles. Even though their livelihood circumstances accentuate the need for more access to welfare support systems, stable employment prospects, and higher earnings, their contribution is still important. Due to lack of continuous employment, they are highly

deprived to access social along with economic benefits. Moreover, the social recognition is low to agricultural labourers while comparing with other segment labours. The limited earnings potential affects them to access several financial benefits (Kumar and Murugesan, 2018).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In rural areas, despite making up a sizable share of the agriculture sector, agricultural labourers' livelihood status is yet unjustifiable. Due to their reliance on seasonal agricultural work, the majority of laborers experience unpredictable income and frequent unemployment during off-seasons. The reliance of agricultural labourers on unofficial credit sources, low pay, and unstable employment all contribute to their financial instability. The quality of life of agricultural labourers is further impacted by subpar housing, insufficient medical services, and restricted educational opportunities. Additionally, social and economic disparities limit their access to opportunities and resources. These problems put agricultural laborers in a never-ending cycle of poverty. As a result, it becomes important to pinpoint the main elements, which affects their livelihood standing and realize the obstacles impeding their general advancement and quality of life.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The need is brought about by the ongoing livelihood difficulties that rural agricultural workers face. The living conditions of agricultural labourers have not significantly improved despite their contribution to agricultural productivity. Agricultural labourers must recognize the elements affecting their income, employment, and living conditions, to properly address their issues. The study aids to identify important problems like low wage, poor housing, inconsistent work, ignorance about assistance, seasonal unemployment, and lack of alternative employment. It also sheds light on how social and economic variables impact their way of life. The findings support stakeholders and policymakers to develop appropriate policies so as to boost employment prospects, increase income stability, and guarantee agricultural laborers have greater access to essential services.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The majority of villagers rely on agriculture and related industries for their livelihood, which greatly influences the nature of work in rural areas (Saranyadevi et al., 2025). The majority of rural households are involved in wage-based agricultural labor, farming, or raising livestock. However, because agricultural operations are seasonal, employment prospects are not consistent throughout the year (Raju, 2017). It reduces the economic stability of rural laborers and causes income swings. A sizable portion of the rural population is made up of landless laborers (Pandian and Valarmathi, 2021). They rely solely on daily wage labor in agricultural fields like plowing, seeding, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting because they do not own any land. Depending on the cropping pattern and weather, their employment is erratic (Naik et al., 2019). The agricultural labourers frequently relocate to other towns in quest of alternate employment during hard times, which has an impact on their social and familial lives. Agricultural labourers are mainly daily wage earners and low-income groups encounter comparable difficulties (Dineshkumar, 2017). Typically, their salary is not enough to cover necessities like food, housing, healthcare, and education. The problems of agricultural labourers are exacerbated by long workdays, physically taxing jobs, and unstable employment. If they faced with financial difficulties, many of them turn to unofficial lenders, which increases their debt (Hatai and Singh, 2019). Rural communities frequently have poor working conditions with little access to social protection and adequate facilities. Additionally, their chances to transition into higher-paying jobs are limited by their low levels of education and skill development (Tiwari and Prawal, 2025).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study is commenced with the following objectives to test.

- To assess the socio-economic profile of agricultural labourers in Poyyundarkottai Village.
- To examine the factors influencing livelihood status of agricultural labourers.
- To measure the different challenges faced by the agricultural labourers.

METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to analyze the livelihood status of agricultural labourers in Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu. The study is based on descriptive research design, which helps to present a clear picture of livelihood conditions of agricultural labourers. Primary data is collected through structured questionnaire from the respondents. The questionnaire consists of three parts such as, socio-economic profile of agricultural labourers, factors influencing livelihood status of agricultural labourers, and different challenges faced by the agricultural labourers. The respondents are selected on voluntary basis and their responses are recorded carefully for further analysis. The statistical tools such as percentage analysis used to describe socio-economic characteristics, factor analysis to identify underlying dimensions, multiple linear regression to examine the influence of selected factors on livelihood status, and one-sample t-test to assess the significance of major challenges faced by agricultural labourers. Findings intended to provide clear information about the conditions of agricultural labourers and offer suitable measures to improve their income stability, employment security, and quality of life in rural areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of Socio-Economic Profile

The socio-economic profile of agricultural labourers such as, gender, age, academic qualification, monthly income, occupation and family size are taken into account for analysis. The results are discussed in Table 1.

Table 1
Socio-Economic Profile

S. No	Socio-Economic Profile	Variables	Frequency	
			N	%
1.	Gender	Male	229	57.25
		Female	171	42.75
2.	Age	Below 30 years	121	30.25
		30 – 45 years	214	53.50
		Above 45 years	65	16.25
3.	Education	Illiterate	127	31.75
		School education	221	55.25
		Diploma/Degree	52	13.00
4.	Monthly Income	Below ₹5,000	137	34.25
		₹5,000 – ₹10,000	145	36.25
		Above ₹10,000	118	29.50
5.	Timing of work	Below 8 hours	138	34.50
		8 – 10 hours	114	28.50
		Above 10 hours	148	37.00
6.	Family Size	Below 3 members	96	24.00
		3 – 5 members	242	60.50
		Above 5 members	62	15.50
Total			400	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 reveals the socio-economic characteristics of the agricultural labourers. Gender indicates that 57.25% of the agricultural labourers are male, while 42.75% are female.

Age shows that 30.25% of agricultural labourers are below 30 years, 53.50% of agricultural labourers are in the 30–45 years range, and 16.25% of agricultural labourers are above 45 years. Education shows that 31.75% of agricultural labourers are illiterate, 55.25% completed school education, and 13% have either diploma or undergraduate degree. Monthly income data reveals that 34.25% of agricultural labourers earn below ₹5,000, 29.50% of agricultural labourers earn ₹5,000 – ₹10,000, and 29.50% of agricultural labourers earn above ₹10,000. Timing of work shows that 34.50% of agricultural labourers are engaged in below 8 hours, 28.50% are of agricultural labourers engaged in 8 – 10 hours, and 37% are of agricultural labourers engaged in above 10 hours. Finally, family size reveals that 24% of agricultural labourers belong to families with less than 3 members, 60.50% belong to families with 3 – 5 members, and 15.50% are from families with more than 5 members.

Factors Influencing Livelihood Status of Agricultural Labourers

Agricultural labourers' income, standard of living, and general well-being are all impacted by a number of interconnected factors that influence their livelihood standing. Factor analysis is used to determine the main underlying factors in order to investigate these conditions. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity are used to verify the data's appropriateness. The data is suitable for factor analysis, as indicated by the KMO value of 0.873 and the chi-square significance value of 0.000. The extracted factors together with the variables that correspond to them are displayed in table 2.

Table 2
Factor Analysis

Factors	Variables	Factor Loadings	Eigen Value	% of Variance
Economic Stability	Level of daily wages	0.842	9.624	22.864
	Monthly income stability	0.831		
	Availability of year-round employment	0.804		
	Alternative income sources	0.786		
	Savings level	0.768		
	Indebtedness	0.751		
	Access to credit	0.777		
	Ownership of productive assets	0.759		
Employment Conditions	Nature of employment	0.826	7.845	16.932
	Working days per month	0.812		
	Type of agricultural work	0.798		
	Wage payment method	0.774		
	Working hours per day	0.761		
	Local job opportunities	0.752		
	Migration for employment	0.768		
Social Background	Educational level	0.818	5.962	12.745
	Social category	0.804		
	Family size	0.789		
	Dependency ratio	0.776		
	Social participation	0.751		
	Gender of labourer	0.763		
Living Conditions	Type of housing	0.807	4.358	8.564
	Drinking water access	0.795		
	Sanitation facilities	0.781		
	Electricity access	0.768		
	Household assets	0.752		

Health and Welfare	Healthcare access	0.776	3.528	5.874
	Nutritional status	0.759		
	Awareness of schemes	0.748		
	Utilization of schemes	0.764		
Infrastructure Facilities	Transportation access	0.751	2.684	3.642
	Distance to workplace	0.768		
	Market facilities availability	0.756		

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 reveals the factors influencing the livelihood status of agricultural labourers, it explains cumulative variance of 70.621% for 33 variables. The most dominant factor is economic stability, which contributes 22.864% of the variance with an Eigen value of 9.624. The factor includes variables such as daily wages, income stability, savings, and access to credit, which directly determine the financial position of labourers. The second factor, employment conditions, accounts for 16.932% of the variance with an Eigen value of 7.845. Variables such as working days, type of employment, and migration indicate the nature and consistency of job opportunities available. The third factor, social background, explains 12.745% of the variance with an Eigen value of 5.962. Educational level, family size, and social category influence the social position and opportunities available to labourers. The fourth factor, living conditions, contributes 8.564% of the variance with an Eigen value of 4.358. Basic amenities such as housing, water, sanitation, and electricity reflect their standard of living. The fifth factor, health and welfare, accounts for 5.874% of the variance with an Eigen value of 3.528, it cares on healthcare access and awareness of welfare schemes. Finally, infrastructure facilities explain 3.642% of the variance with an Eigen value of 2.684, it indicates the importance of transport and market access. It is inferred that economic and employment-related factors have a strong influence on the livelihood status of agricultural labourers.

The multiple regression analysis is used to evaluate the influence of the six factors identified through factor analysis, multiple linear regression analysis has been carried out. The six extracted factors are treated as independent variables, and the livelihood status of agricultural labourers is considered as the dependent variable, the results are exhibited in table 3.

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t value	Sig.
		β	Std. Error			
Constant	Livelihood Status of Agricultural Labourers	-0.592	0.614		-1.184	0.004
Economic Stability		0.432	0.071	0.448	6.912	0.003
Employment Conditions		0.256	0.082	0.221	4.126	0.001
Social Background		0.214	0.076	0.198	3.874	0.003
Living Conditions		0.187	0.058	0.176	3.652	0.004
Health and Welfare		0.149	0.064	0.138	3.818	0.003
Infrastructure Facilities		0.118	0.049	0.109	3.604	0.004

R	0.812
R ²	0.659
Adjusted R ²	0.571
F Value	30.284

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 presents the results of multiple linear regression analysis, it shows the value of R² (0.659) shows that 65.9% of the variation in livelihood status is explained through the selected factors, while the Adjusted R² (0.571) confirms the overall fit of the model. Among the variables, economic stability records the highest beta coefficient (0.432) with a t-value of 6.912, it confirms strong influence on the livelihood status at 1% significance level. It shows that factors such as income level, savings, access to credit, and asset ownership largely determine the economic position of agricultural labourers. The second important factor is employment conditions, with beta value of 0.256 and t-value of 4.126, it stresses the importance of regular employment, working days, and migration in shaping income security. Social background also shows a notable influence with a beta value of 0.214, it indicates that education, family structure, and social category affect the living conditions of labourers. Further, living conditions ($\beta = 0.187$) and health and welfare ($\beta = 0.149$) are statistically significant, it proves the importance of housing, sanitation, healthcare access, and awareness of welfare schemes. Infrastructure facilities ($\beta = 0.118$) also contribute to livelihood improvement through better transport and market access. The F-value confirms that the overall model is statistically significant. It is inferred that economic and employment-related aspects have strong effect on improving the livelihood status of agricultural labourers.

Challenges of Agricultural Labourers

Agricultural labourers experience several difficulties to maintain stable livelihoods. These challenges were identified during the pilot study; the respondents are asked to rate each issue on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. To examine the significance of these challenges, a one-sample t-test is applied with a test value of 3. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4
One-Sample T-Test**

Variables	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig.	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
Lack of alternative employment	14.218	399	.000	0.998	0.876	1.142
High indebtedness	13.507	399	.000	0.954	0.842	1.098
Poor sanitation facilities	8.952	399	.000	0.818	0.702	0.935
Seasonal unemployment	15.376	399	.000	1.046	0.938	1.187
Inadequate healthcare facilities	11.925	399	.000	0.906	0.798	1.045
Poor housing conditions	12.864	399	.000	0.921	0.803	1.064
Limited access to welfare schemes	9.875	399	.000	0.842	0.731	0.964
Low wage levels	16.842	399	.000	1.082	0.964	1.214
Transportation difficulties	7.986	399	.000	0.786	0.674	0.902
Lack of educational opportunities	10.748	399	.000	0.874	0.765	0.998

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 presents the results of the one-sample t-test with a test value of 3, it reveals the perceived severity of challenges faced by agricultural labourers. All the variables show significance at the 1% level, it confirms that these challenges are highly relevant. The low wage levels rank first with the highest mean difference (1.082) and t-value (16.842), it discloses that inadequate income is the most critical problem affecting agricultural labourers. Seasonal unemployment follows closely with a mean difference of 1.046, it shows the impact of irregular job opportunities on their livelihood. Lack of alternative employment and high indebtedness also record high mean differences (0.998 and 0.954), it proves limited income diversification and financial burden. Poor housing conditions and inadequate healthcare facilities further affect their quality of life, with mean differences of 0.921 and 0.906 respectively. Challenges such as lack of educational opportunities, limited access to welfare schemes, and poor sanitation facilities show moderate influence, indicating gaps in social and public service support. Transportation difficulties record the lowest mean difference (0.786), but still remain significant, it highlights issues related to accessibility. It is inferred that economic and employment-related challenges dominate the living conditions of agricultural labourers, while social and infrastructural issues also contribute to their overall socio-economic status.

CONCLUSION

The study evidently discloses the examination of livelihood condition of agricultural labourers. The socio-economic profile of agricultural labourers shows that most of the agricultural labourers are male, belong to middle age group, they are qualified with moderate education, their income is limited, engaged in extended working hours and limited income stability. The factor analysis identified six major dimensions influencing livelihood status, namely economic stability, employment conditions, social background, living conditions, health and welfare, and infrastructure facilities. Among these, economic stability emerges as the most dominant factor, it reveals that income level, wage security, savings, and access to credit strongly shape the living standards of agricultural labourers. Employment conditions also play a major role, it divulges the importance of regular work availability and income continuity in rural areas.

The multiple linear regression analysis further confirms the significance of these factors. The model explains a considerable proportion of variation in livelihood status, it shows that all six factors significantly contribute to the dependent variable. Economic stability records the highest influence, followed by employment conditions, social background, and living conditions. Health and welfare, along with infrastructure facilities, also show meaningful but comparatively lower effects. It clearly designates that economic and employment-related aspects are the primary drivers of socio-economic improvement among agricultural labourers. The one-sample t-test results disclose the major challenges faced by agricultural labourers. Low wage levels, seasonal unemployment, and lack of alternative employment opportunities are identified as the most severe problems. High indebtedness, poor housing conditions, inadequate healthcare, and limited access to welfare schemes further worsen their living conditions. All variables are found to be statistically significant, it proves that these challenges are widely experienced and strongly perceived among agricultural labourers.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The government should take proper care on agricultural labourers, the care can be in the form of free ration, medical insurance, free higher education to their kids, and funding support to purchase required implements. In addition to that the development of agriculture through farm mechanization efforts can significantly reduce the harmful use of physical labour to carryout regular work. The agriculture universities and educational institutions should make proper solution to transform the hard working nature of agriculture labourers

towards easy working. The government should make monthly pension scheme to both farmers and farm labours so as to fulfill the growing need for food products from agricultural sector.

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