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Profile characteristics of farm labourers

[1]PM Hatitel, [2]JR Kadam, [3]PM Zagade, [4]SK Mayekar, [5]GR Uike and [6]Abasaheb Vilas Desai

[1]M.Sc. Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, College of Agriculture, Dapoli, DBSKKV Dapoli, Maharashtra, India

[2]Ex-Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, DBSKKV, Dapoli, Maharashtra, India

[3]Junior Research Assistant, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, DBSKKV, Dapoli, Maharashtra, India

[4]Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, DBSKKV, Dapoli, Maharashtra, India

[5]Assistant Professor, College of Horticulture, Mulde, Maharashtra, India

[6]Ph.D scholar, Agricultural Extension Education, College of Agriculture, DBSKKV, Dapoli, MAHARASHTRA, India

Corresponding Author: PM Hatitel

Abstract
The study was undertaken in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of the Konkan region, Maharashtra, to analyze the socio-economic profile characteristics of farm labourers working under Dr. Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth (DBSKKV). An ex-post facto research design was employed, and data were collected from 120 randomly selected farm labourers across major research stations of the University. The results revealed that most respondents belonged to the middle-age category (69.17%), had education up to primary or secondary level (67.50%), lived in medium-sized families (54.17%), owned marginal to small landholdings (73.33%), and earned low to medium annual income (62.50%). The average farming experience was 34 years, with two-thirds of respondents falling in the medium category. Farm labour served as the primary occupation, while subsidiary wage work provided supplementary income. The study concluded that farm labourers constitute a socio-economically vulnerable group with limited skills, unstable income, and poor access to resources. Targeted interventions focusing on livelihood diversification, skill development, and social protection are required to improve their economic security and quality of life.

Keywords: Farm labourers, profile characteristics, livelihood, socio-economic status, Konkan region

Introduction

India, with its vast agricultural base, continues to face widespread rural poverty due to unequal resource distribution, low levels of education, landlessness, and dependence on unorganized labour. Agriculture is the principal source of livelihood for the rural population, yet farm labourers—the backbone of agricultural operations—remain among the most vulnerable groups. Unlike cultivators, farm labourers generally do not own land and rely on working on others' farms for wages, either in cash or kind.

In rural India, farm labourers are typically drawn from socially and economically weaker sections. They represent a large proportion of the workforce but remain unorganized, underpaid, and excluded from most welfare measures. Their employment is seasonal and irregular, dictated by the cropping cycle. During peak seasons, demand for labour is high, but in lean periods, many are compelled to migrate or take up non-farm work such as construction or casual wage labour. Women form a crucial part of this workforce, participating in operations like sowing, transplanting,

weeding, and harvesting, yet often face wage discrimination and heavy workloads. Historically, the emergence of farm labour is linked to land ownership patterns and agricultural development. With increasing land fragmentation and indebtedness, many small farmers were pushed into wage labour. Mechanization has further reduced employment opportunities, deepening their economic insecurity. In the Konkan region of Maharashtra, particularly Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts, the research stations of Dr. Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth (DBSKKV) depend heavily on farm labourers for crop maintenance, field trials, and allied activities. Despite their contribution, they continue to struggle with poverty and job insecurity.

Considering these issues, the present study entitled 'Profile Characteristics of Farm Labourers' was undertaken to assess their socio-economic conditions. The study specifically focused on age, education, family size, major occupation, landholding, annual income, and farming experience—factors that determine their livelihood security.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of the South Konkan region of Maharashtra, as these districts accommodate the highest number of agricultural research stations under DBSKKV. Seven research stations were selected: four from Ratnagiri (Bhatye, Shirgaon, Awashi, and Wakawali) and three from Sindhudurg (Vengurla, Mulde, and Nileli). Two stations with very few permanent labourers were excluded from the sample.

A total of 120 farm labourers were selected using a simple random sampling technique. From Ratnagiri district, 95 respondents were drawn from 202 identified labourers, while from Sindhudurg district, all available respondents were included. Data were collected using a structured interview schedule.

The ex-post facto research design was adopted, as the study dealt with variables that had already occurred and were beyond the control of the researcher. According to Kerlinger (1976), ex-post facto research is a systematic empirical inquiry in which the researcher does not have direct control over variables because their manifestations have already occurred or cannot be manipulated.

Results and Discussion

The socio-economic profile of farm labourers was analyzed in terms of age, education, family size, occupation, income, landholding, and farming experience and presented in Table 1.

Age

The majority of farm labourers (69.17%) were middle-aged, with an average age of 51 years. This group is physically active and economically dependent on wage labour.

Education

About 39.17% had education up to the secondary level, 28.33% up to primary, and 21.67% up to pre-primary. Only 5.83% were illiterate, indicating a fair level of basic literacy. However, very few had higher education, reflecting economic hardship and early entry into the workforce.

Family Size

More than half (54.17%) lived in medium-sized families, followed by 32.50% in small families. Larger families (13.33%) faced greater dependency burdens.

Occupation

Half of the labourers (50%) worked as permanent wage labourers, 37.50% combined farming with labour work, and 12.50% engaged in business. This shows high dependence on wage employment and limited livelihood diversification.

Annual Income

Most respondents (62.50%) fell into the medium income category, with an average annual income of ₹4,73,467. Only 15.83% reported high income levels.

Landholding

A large majority (73.33%) owned marginal holdings (up to 1 ha), while the remaining 26.67% had small holdings (1–2 ha). None were landless, but landholdings were too small to ensure livelihood security.

Farming Experience

Two-thirds (66.67%) had medium farming experience, averaging 34 years. This indicates long-term involvement in farming, though limited resources continue to force dependence on wage labour.

Overall, the findings confirm that farm labourers are socio-economically constrained, with small landholdings, low levels of education, and limited income opportunities.

Table 1: Profile characteristics of farm labourers

Sl. No.	Profile characteristics and their categories	Respondents (N=120)	
		Frequency	Percentage
	Age (Year)		
1.	Young (up to 43)	20	16.66
2.	Middle (44 to 58)	83	69.17
3.	Old (59 and above)	17	14.17
	Total	120	100.00
	Education (Std)		
1.	Illiterate (No education)	7	5.83
2.	Pre-Primary (up to to 4th)	26	21.67
3.	Primary (5th to 7th)	34	28.33
4.	Secondary (8th to 10th)	47	39.17
5.	Higher-Secondary (11th to 12th)	6	5.00
	Total	120	100.00
	Family Size (Members)		
1.	Small (up to 4)	39	32.50
2.	Medium (5 to 6)	65	54.17
3.	Large (7 and above)	16	13.33
	Total	120	100.00
	Major Occupation		
1.	Permanent Labour	60	50.00
2.	Business	15	12.50
3.	Farming	45	37.50
	Total	120	100.00
	Annual Income (Rs.)		
1.	Low (Up to 3,62,271)	26	21.67
2.	Medium (3,62,272 to 5,84,660)	75	62.50
3.	High (5,84,661 and above)	19	15.83
	Total	120	100.00
	Land Holding (Hectares)		
1.	Marginal (up to 1.00)	88	73.33
2.	Small (1.01 to 2.00)	32	26.67
	Total	120	100.00
	Farm Experience (years)		
1.	Low (up to 25)	23	19.16
2.	Medium (26 to 42)	80	66.67
3.	High (43 and above)	17	14.17
	Total	120	100.00

Conclusion

The study concludes that farm labourers in the Konkan region are predominantly middle-aged, moderately educated, and belong to medium-sized families. Permanent wage labour forms their primary occupation, with farming on small holdings and subsidiary employment providing supplementary income. Although their average income reflects moderate livelihood security, limited land resources, low levels of education, and unstable employment restrict their socio-economic mobility. Policy interventions are required to strengthen livelihood diversification, improve access to education and skill development, and enhance social protection measures for this vulnerable group.

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