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# A Study On the Work-Life Balance of Migrant Labourers in The Civil Construction Sector in The Northern Chennai Area

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the intricate dynamics of work-life balance among migrant laborers employed in the civil construction sector within the northern Chennai area. The research delves into the unique challenges faced by this demographic, exploring the impact of their employment on various aspects of their personal lives. Using a simple approach, data was collected through surveys, interviews and observations to comprehensively analyze the work conditions, living situations, and coping mechanisms employed by migrant laborers. Through thematic analysis, the study reveals the significant struggles and trade-offs these individuals face in balancing work demands with personal well-being, family relationships, and social integration. Findings also illuminate the role of socio-economic factors, housing conditions, and support systems in shaping the work-life experiences of migrant laborers. Recommendations are provided to stakeholders in the civil construction sector, policymakers, and community organizations to address the challenges highlighted and improve the overall work-life balance of migrant laborers in the region.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Interstate migration has become a widespread phenomenon across India, with many internal migrants relocating for employment or economic reasons. Notably, one of the sectors witnessing the highest incidence of such migration is the construction industry. In northern Chennai, the civil construction sector functions as a vital economic hub, largely driven by the efforts of migrant laborers from states such as West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, and Manipur. These workers play an indispensable role in infrastructure development, yet their contributions often go unrecognized. Despite their significance, migrant laborers face multiple challenges in balancing the demands of work with personal and family responsibilities. Long hours, poor working and living conditions, limited job security, and social isolation can severely impact their overall well-being. Understanding these issues is crucial to developing effective strategies that enhance their work-life balance, satisfaction, and productivity.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Chennai's booming economy, particularly in infrastructure and construction, has led to a surge in demand for labor, attracting migrants from various regions. Many leave their home states due to low agricultural wages, unemployment, or underemployment, and are drawn to Chennai by higher wages and better job prospects. These migrant workers typically occupy roles such as construction laborers, electricians, plumbers, and casual workers—positions critical to the city's development.

However, maintaining a healthy work-life balance remains a pressing concern. Work-life balance, which involves managing job responsibilities alongside family and personal commitments, is a crucial factor in employee satisfaction and overall effectiveness. Studies have shown a strong link between work-family balance and job satisfaction across professions, yet little attention has been paid to these dynamics in the context of low-skilled migrant laborers.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the demographic characteristics and migration patterns of laborers in the civil construction sector in northern Chennai.
- To assess the working conditions, job satisfaction, and occupational stress levels of migrant laborers in the civil construction sector.
- To examine the impact of work-life balance on the physical and mental well-being of migrant laborers in the civil construction sector.
- To identify the social support systems and networks used by migrant laborers to manage work and personal life, and to determine the level of acculturation and integration into the local community.
- To provide recommendations for improving work-life balance and overall well-being of migrant laborers in the civil construction sector in northern Chennai, and to inform policies and interventions that support their health and well-being.
- The data was analysed in terms of percentage and few results were analyzed statistically using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Migrant Labourers

According to Denzil Fernandus and Bino Paul G.D (2011), migrant labourers often rely on established social networks—comprising contractors, agents, relatives, and former migrants—to access employment opportunities in destinations like Goa. Migration often follows patterns of cumulative causation, where earlier movements influence future ones. As more migrants enter specific sectors, such as construction or domestic work, these occupations become culturally associated with migrant workers. Thus, migration is shaped not just by economic needs but by evolving social contexts and labour market dynamics that perpetuate the cycle of migration.

### 3.2 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to a state where individuals manage job responsibilities alongside personal and family interests, achieving equilibrium between the two. Definitions vary: Swamy (2007) emphasizes balancing work with personal responsibilities, while Hudson (2005) describes it as the fit between different life roles. Work-life balance programs help organizations attract and retain talent while promoting employee well-being. Some scholars prefer the term work-life harmony, which focuses on synchronizing internal and external demands rather than separating them (Anon, 2011).

### 3.3 Work-Life Models

Several models explain how job demands and resources affect employee well-being. The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) links factors like autonomy and feedback to well-being. The Vitamin Model (Warr, 1987) suggests mental health is influenced by environmental factors such as control, variety, support, and job security. While international studies support these models, there is a lack of research on how migrant workers in Chennai experience job demands and resources.

### 3.4 Social Support and Well being

One of the most important factors helping employees with combining work and family roles is social support. When providing social support, one aims to help the person who receives the support by increasing the person's personal resource supply (Van Daalen, Willemsen, & Sanders, 2006). COR theory (Hobfou, 2002) suggests that support intervenes in the depleting effects of stressors on outcomes by adding or replenishing personal resources. Social support is thought to help employees balance work and family roles because it gives them additional time, energy, and fulfilment (Ten Brummelhuis et al., 2010).

### 3.5 Family-Related Factors

Family demands, such as childcare and household responsibilities, significantly impact work-life balance. These demands are influenced by factors like number of dependents, family size, and parental status. Married employees, especially parents with young children, experience higher family-work conflict (FWC). In dual-income households, household chores intensify stress, especially for working women. Additionally, lack of reliable data on migrant laborers in Chennai's construction sector highlights the need for focused research on their work-life challenges.

## 4. RESEARCH PROCESS

This study followed the seven-step research process proposed by Cooper and Schindler (2003). It began with topic exploration, reviewing existing literature, and consulting experts to define the research problem. Based on this, specific research questions and hypotheses were developed, along with a conceptual framework. The research design was then planned, detailing methods for data collection and analysis.

### 4.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out in North Chennai with 10 respondents. The objective was to refine the questionnaire by ensuring each question was clear and relevant to the participants' understanding. This improved the overall reliability and validity of the instrument.

### 4.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The target sample size was 120, anticipating a final valid sample of 100 after excluding incomplete responses. A random sampling technique was used to ensure representativeness. Given the low literacy levels among migrant laborers, a personally administered structured questionnaire was used, with researchers visiting participants at their residences to gather accurate primary data.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Demographic Information

#### 5.1.1 Gender of Migrant Labourers

Interstate migrant labourers from various states of India are residing in Chennai for their livelihood. The gender of these migrant labourers who are engaged in civil construction The analysis reveals that majority of the migrant labourers engaged in civil construction sector in Northern Chennai area are males. Among the total 100 respondents 85 percent were males and 15 percent respondents were females.

TABLE 1.

S. No	Respondents	Total in %
1	Male	85
2	Female	15

#### 5.1.2 Age of Migrant Labourers

The analysis reveals that majority of the migrant labourers engaged in civil construction sector in Northern Chennai area are aged between 20 – 30years.

TABLE 2.

S. No	Respondents Age in years	Total in %
1	20-30	54
2	30-40	22
3	40-50	13
4	50-60	11

#### 5.1.3 State of Origin of Migrant Labourers

The analysis reveals that majority of the migrant labourers engaged in civil construction sector in Northern Chennai area are from State of Bihar.

TABLE 3.

S. No	Respondents State of Origin	Total in %
1	Bihar	58
2	Uttar Pradesh	24
3	Madhya Pradesh	14
4	Assam	4

#### 5.1.4 Occupation of Migrant Labourers

The analysis reveals that majority of the migrant labourers engaged in civil construction Sector in Northern Chennai area are mostly from Labour category.

**TABLE 4.**

S. No	Respondents Occupation	Total in %
1	Technician	14
2	Electrician	11
3	Plumber	17
4	Labour	58

### 5.1.5 Years of Experience of Migrant Labourers

The analysis reveals that majority of the migrant labourers engaged in civil construction Sector in Northern Chennai area are having 5 -10 years of experience.

**TABLE 5.**

S. No	Years of Experience	Total in %
1	5-10	59
2	10-15	18
3	15-20	14
4	20-25	9

### 5.2 Challenges in Maintaining Work-Life Balance

1. Long Working Hours and Limited Time Off
  - \* 57% work 8–10 hours, and 42% work more than 10 hours daily.
  - \* 88% get only 0–1 day off per week.
  - \* These extended work hours leave minimal time for personal or family life.
2. Lack of Control over Work Schedules
  - \* 88% report no control over their work timings, which restricts flexibility and personal planning.
3. High Levels of Work Stress and Overwork
  - \* 67% feel overworked.
  - \* 47% experience stress very often; only 11% rarely feel stressed.
4. Limited Time for Leisure or Hobbies
  - \* 93% have no time for leisure or hobbies, indicating poor personal life engagement.
5. Separation from Family
  - \* 93% do not live with their families, although 94% maintain daily communication.
  - \* Emotional distance and lack of direct family support contribute to stress and imbalance.
6. Low Social Integration
  - \* 89% do not feel connected to the local community.
  - \* 62% rarely participate in local events or festivals, which limits social bonding and emotional relief.
7. Inadequate Basic Amenities and Support
  - \* 82% do not receive housing or food support from their employer.
  - \* Poor living conditions add pressure to already strained lives.
8. Work-Life Imbalance
  - \* 79% report an inability to balance work and personal life.
  - \* Although 83% engage in some joyful activities, it doesn't translate to full well-being or satisfaction.
9. Job Satisfaction and Recognition
  - \* 47% rate job satisfaction as neutral, with only 9% feeling highly satisfied.
  - \* 42% feel rarely recognized at work, leading to feelings of under appreciation.

### 5.3 Life-Related Factors

1. Living Conditions:
  - \* 93% of migrant labourers do not live with their family.
  - \* However, 94% communicate daily with family, indicating strong family ties despite separation.

2. Community Integration:

- \* 89% do not feel connected to the local community.
- \* Yet 83% feel they fit in, and 87% believe they've maintained their cultural identity, suggesting a surface-level social integration
- \* without deeper emotional connection.

3. Basic Amenities:

- \* 82% do not receive housing or food from their employer, highlighting poor access to basic living support.
- \* Personal Life Satisfaction:
  - \* The responses are mixed, with only 7% highly satisfied, while 31% report dissatisfaction.
  - \* Correlation ( $R = 0$ ) indicates no significant relationship between personal life factors and overall satisfaction levels.

#### **5.4 Works-Life Balance**

1. Balance Issues:

- \* 79% report not maintaining a work-life balance.
- \* 47% feel stressed very often, and 93% do not have time for hobbies or leisure.

2. Job-Personal Life Conflict:

Common challenges cited include:

- \* Long working hours
- \* Lack of managerial support
- \* Family care duties
- \* High job pressure and lack of rest
- \* Burnout due to blurred work-life boundaries
- \* Satisfaction with Balance:
  - Only 5% are highly satisfied.
  - Majority (33%) is moderately satisfied, but significant 35% report dissatisfaction.
  - Weak negative correlation ( $R = -0.0853$ ) indicates only a minor inverse link between work conditions and satisfaction.

#### **5.5 Personal Well-being**

1. Stress and Anxiety:

- \* 75% report frequent stress (41% often + 34% very often).

2. Healthcare Access:

- \* 97% have access to healthcare in Chennai, which is a positive finding.

3. Physical Health Satisfaction:

- \* Majority is moderately satisfied, but 35% report dissatisfaction.
- \* Weak correlation ( $R = -0.0853$ ) again reflects only a minor connection between physical health satisfaction and other well-being factors.

4. Engagement in Joyful Activities:

- \* 83% report engaging in activities that bring joy and relaxation — a surprising positive amidst other challenges.

#### **5.6 Acculturation and Integration**

1. Cultural Comfort:

- \* 76% feel comfortable with local language and culture to some degree.
- \* Weak positive correlation ( $R = 0.2674$ ) suggests some influence on job satisfaction or well-being.

2. Participation in Community:

- \* 62% rarely participate in festivals/events, which may contribute to low emotional connection despite fitting in.

### 5.7 Job Security and Satisfaction

1. Job Security:
  - \* Only 8% feel highly secure.
  - \* Most (34%) feel only average job security.
  - \* Weak positive correlation ( $R = 0.1726$ ).
2. Job Satisfaction:
  - \* 46% are satisfied (9% highly, 37% satisfied).
  - \* 25% are dissatisfied, while 29% remain neutral.
  - \* Slightly stronger correlation ( $R = 0.3006$ ) indicates job satisfaction is modestly tied to other factors like growth opportunities or recognition.
3. Growth Opportunities:
  - \* 81% feel they have growth opportunities, a very promising insight.
4. Recognition:
  - \* 42% rarely feel recognized.
  - \* Recognition is still a key missing link in workplace morale.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the work-life balance of migrant laborers in the civil construction sector in the Northern Chennai area. The findings reveal a complex and challenging situation, with laborers facing significant difficulties in balancing their work and personal life. The study highlights the long working hours, physical demands of the job and limited access to social support and resources, which collectively contribute to the poor work-life balance of migrant laborers. The findings also underscore the impact of this imbalance on laborers' physical and mental well-being, relationships and overall quality of life. The results have important implications for policymakers, construction companies, and social support organizations. To improve the work-life balance of migrant laborers, it is essential to implement policies and programs that address their specific needs, such as flexible working arrangements, access to healthcare and social services and safe and affordable housing. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for constructing companies to prioritize labourers' well-being and provide a supportive work environment. This can be achieved by promoting a culture of work-life balance, providing resources for mental health and wellness and fostering a sense of community and belonging among laborers. Ultimately, this study demonstrates the importance of prioritizing the work-life balance and well-being of migrant laborers in the civil construction sector, not only as a moral imperative but also as a critical factor in promoting their productivity, job satisfaction and overall quality of life.

### 6.1 Recommendations:

- Implement flexible working arrangements and ensure fair compensation for laborers.
- Provide access to healthcare, social services and safe and affordable housing.
- Promote a culture of work-life balance and provide resources for mental health and wellness.
- Foster a sense of community and belonging among laborers.
- Conduct further research to explore the experiences of migrant laborers in other industries and regions.

By prioritizing the work-life balance and well-being of migrant laborers, we can work towards creating a more equitable and sustainable construction industry that values the contributions and dignity of all workers.

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