

UNVEILING SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS FACED BY WOMEN CASHEW WORKERS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS

*A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Kerala in the Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters of Arts Degree
Examination in Sociology*

SUBMITTED BY

Name : **LEKSHMI S**
Exam Code : 56018401
Candidate Code: 56021115016
Subject Code : SO245

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

Dr. NISHA JOLLY NELSON



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
LOYOLA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
SREEKARIYAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
UNIVERSITY OF KERALA
2021-2023**

DECLARATION

I, **LEKSHMI S** do hereby declare that the dissertation titled **UNVEILING SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS FACED BY WOMEN CASHEW WORKERS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS** is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the University of Kerala during the year 2021-2023 towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree Examination in Sociology. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other similar title of recognition before any University or anywhere else.

Thiruvananthapuram

18/08/2023

Ms. LEKSHMI S

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **UNVEILING SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS FACED BY WOMEN CASHEW WORKERS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS** is a record of genuine work done by Ms. LEKSHMI S fourth semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

Dr. Nisha Jolly Nelson
Research Guide
Department of Sociology
Loyola College of Social Sciences
Sreekariyam

Recommended for forwarding to the University of Kerala

Dr. Nisha Jolly Nelson
Head, Department of Sociology
Loyola College of Social sciences
Sreekariyam

Forwarded to the University of Kerala

Dr. Saji P Jacob
Principal
Loyola College of Social Sciences
Sreekariyam

18/08/2023
Sreekariyam

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“Showing gratitude is one of the simplest yet most powerful things humans can do for each other.”

I have not traveled alone in the journey of completion of this dissertation. This study has been kept on track and been seen through to completion with the support and encouragement of numerous people including my teachers, well-wishers, my friends, family and God Almighty.

*First and foremost, I take it as a privilege to thank my research guide **Dr. Nisha Jolly Nelson**, Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam. The door to Prof. Nisha’s office was always open whenever I ran into a trouble spot or had a question about my research or writing. She consistently allowed this work to be my own work, and steered me in the right direction whenever she thought I needed it. At this juncture I extend my sincere gratitude and respect for all of the sacrifices she made so that my studies could be completed.*

*I extend my heartfelt gratitude to **Dr. Saji P Jacob**, Principal, Loyola College of Social Sciences. Thanks to other faculties of the Department of Sociology **Dr. Hashim Thadathil**, **Mr. Andrew Michael** and faculties from other departments who were involved in the validation of the progress of my dissertation during department and college level presentations. Without their passionate participation and input, the validation of this study would not have been successfully done.*

I am also grateful to my respondents for their valuable inputs, which have contributed to the successful completion of this study.

*I am privileged to be a student of Loyola College for having provided me such a great learning experience which sparked my interest in research field. Thanks to our rich library resources and the two persons **Dr. Sunil Kumar**, Librarian and **Mr. George Mathew**, Assistant librarian for assisting us in many ways in using the resources.*

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my parents and to my dear friends and many others for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my study and through the process of researching and writing this dissertation. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.

LEKSHMI S

18/08/2023

MA SOCIOLOGY

**UNVEILING SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS FACED BY WOMEN
CASHEW WORKERS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

MA SOCIOLOGY

2021-2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF GRAPHS	viii
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER I.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 CASHEW INDUSTRY IN INDIA.....	2
1.3 CASHEW INDUSTRY IN KERALA	2
1.4 CASHEW INDUSTRY IN KOLLAM	3
1.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS	4
1.4. COVID-19 AND CASHEW FACTORY WORKERS	4
1.5. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	5
1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	6
CHAPTER II	8
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	8
2.1. INTRODUCTION.....	8
2.2. RESEARCH GAP	15
CHAPTER III	16
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	16
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	16
3.2. TITLE OF THE STUDY	16
3.3. OBJECTIVES	16
3.4. HYPOTHESIS	16
3.5. VARIABLES.....	16
3.6. RESEARCH STRATEGY	17
3.7. RESEARCH DESIGN.....	17
3.8. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS	17
3.9. AREA AND UNIVERSE OF STUDY	18
3.10. PILOT STUDY	18
3.11. PRETEST.....	18

3.12. SAMPLING	19
3.13. SOURCE OF DATA.....	19
3.14. TOOL OF DATA COLLECTION	19
3.15 DATA COLLECTION.....	19
3.16. DATA ANALYSIS.....	20
3.17. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY	20
CHAPTER IV.....	21
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	21
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	21
4.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE.....	21
4.3. CHALLENGES FACED DUE TO FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES.....	25
4.4. DIFFICULTIES FACED DURING COVID-19	28
4.5. IMPACT OF LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT.....	34
4.6. ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS AND MANAGEMENT IN COMBATING CHALLENGES.....	37
4.7. CORRELATION BETWEEN BAD HEALTH AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP.....	46
4.8. CORRELATION BETWEEN CHALLENGES FACED AND MANAGEMENT/ TRADE UNION SUPPORT	46
4.9. DISCUSSION	47
CHAPTER V	51
FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION.....	51
5.1. INTRODUCTION.....	51
5.2. MAJOR FINDINGS.....	51
5.3. SUGGESTIONS	52
5.4. CONCLUSION	53
REFERENCES	54
APPENDIX	57

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO	TITLE	PAGE NO
1	Correlation between bad health and financial hardship	46
2	Correlation between challenges faced and management support	47

LIST OF GRAPHS

GRAPH NO:	TITLE	PAGE NO:
1	Age of the respondents	21
2	Marital status of the respondents	22
3	Educational status of the respondents	22
4	Living location	23
5	Type of household	23
6	Number of family members	24
7	Number of earning members	24
8	Years of work experience	25
9	Primary income generator	25
10	Income satisfaction	26
11	Time spends with family	26
12	Discrimination faced	27
13	Response to whether they are able to participate in family programs	28
14	Decrease in work	28
15	Remuneration received	29
16	Usual working hours	29
17	Work loss during pandemic	30
18	Reduction in working time	30
19	Work shift	31
20	Traffic difficulties faced	31
21	Difficulty in getting vaccine	32

22	Health problems faced during pandemic	32
23	Effects in health	33
24	Relation between bad health and earning	33
25	Alternative source of income	34
26	Other earning member	34
27	Difficulty in finding other source of income	35
28	Expense meet	35
29	Response to whether had any bank loan or chitty	36
30	Exploitation faced	36
31	Response to whether have savings or not	37
32	Response to whether the trade union is active	37
33	Supportive measures of union	38
34	Response to whether member of union or not	38
35	Satisfaction of union support	39
36	Employee cooperative society	39
37	Support of management	40
38	Mode of salary	40
39	Satisfaction from support of management	41
40	Willingness of future work	41
41	Difficulties faced after reopening	42
42	Adaptability to new changes	42
43	Awareness class given	43
44	Services at free of cost	44
45	Changes in emotional bonding	44
46	Precautionary measures taken	45
47	Effective safety measures	45

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to various sectors of the global economy, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations such as women employed in the cashew industry. This quantitative research study aims to investigate the socio-economic hardships encountered by women cashew workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on Kollam district. The study was conducted among sixty women cashew workers, assessing their socio-economic status, employment conditions, income disruptions, access to healthcare, and coping strategies during the pandemic. Only those cashew women workers who worked during the pre-COVID period and at the COVID time were included. Interview schedule was the tool used for data collection.

The findings reveal a complex web of challenges faced by women cashew workers in the wake of the pandemic. The closure of cashew processing units and disruptions in the supply chain led to widespread job losses and reduced income opportunities for these women. The lack of financial reserves and limited access to social safety nets exacerbated their vulnerability. Additionally, the study highlights the unequal burden of domestic responsibilities that intensified due to lockdown measures, placing additional strain on these workers.

The research also identifies varying degrees of access to healthcare services among women cashew workers, further contributing to their vulnerability. Coping strategies adopted by these workers include borrowing, engaging in alternative income-generating activities, and seeking support from local networks and NGOs.

The implications of these findings underscore the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and support mechanisms to mitigate the socio-economic impact of crises on vulnerable women workers in the cashew industry. This research contributes to the broader understanding of how gender-specific challenges intersect with economic disruptions, shedding light on the nuanced experiences of women cashew workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings can inform the design of responsive policies aimed at building resilience and ensuring equitable recovery for this marginalized demographic.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The cashew workers of Kerala are a group whose history and present situation are of relevance to scholars of the humanities and social science for several reasons. During the past six or seven decades, female cashew factory employees have constituted the largest single group of registered workers in Kerala. They have been organized in trade unions since the 1940s and often have been the most militant of all workers, as measured by man-days lost due to strike. Processing cashew nuts is mostly a seasonal activity focused on exports. The sector gained popularity only in the 1950s, and since then, the number of cashew nut manufacturers has been rising. A labor-intensive sector, cashew processing employs more over three lakh people directly, 94% of whom are women from rural, economically, and socially underdeveloped regions.

WOMEN WORKERS

In India, women play important role in every family, but in the ancient period women are dependent on man. Historically women have been discriminated against men in the male dominated society. Most of the girls were married when they were in their teens. Widow remarriages were a social taboo, education beyond the primary or at the most school level was rare. Girls, especially in rural areas and small towns were deliberately undernourished and denied access to the outside world and women were fit to food but not work in business establishments. As we go into the future, discrimination against women will go and they will occupy equal status along with their male counterparts. Today's girls are better educated, more assertive and bolder. Employment is an important indicator of women's achievement in the economic condition. In the services of professional and industrial sector employment of women has increased rapidly. Work participation rate for females has shown as increasing trend in the rural and urban areas. In factories such as cashew industries, coir industries, readymade garments and clock manufacturing, the labor force mainly is of women (Sivanesan, 2013).

The financial demands placed on Indian families are increasing daily. The majority of household chores are not shared by men in India, so women bear the bulk of the responsibility for managing the family. Indian working women face a lot more obstacles than their counterparts. They have to

work a 9 to 5 job and take care of all the household duties. They lose up to 14 hours of sleep a day, because they even work after they get home.

1.2 CASHEW INDUSTRY IN INDIA

The cashew industry in India holds a prominent position in both the domestic and international markets, contributing significantly to the country's economy, employment, and global trade. Renowned for its taste, nutritional value, and versatility, cashew nuts are a crucial agricultural commodity that has a widespread demand across various industries. The history of the cashew industry in India dates to its introduction by the Portuguese in the 16th century. However, it wasn't until the 1950s that the industry gained widespread recognition and started making a substantial impact on the country's economy. The cultivation and processing of cashew nuts have become a vital component of India's agricultural and industrial landscape. India is the world's largest producer, processor, and exporter of cashew nuts. The cashew industry plays a pivotal role in the country's export earnings and foreign exchange reserves. The industry not only generates substantial revenue but also provides employment opportunities to a significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas. The cashew industry is a significant source of employment in India, particularly for women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Women constitute a substantial proportion of the workforce engaged in various stages of cashew processing, from shelling to packaging. This has empowered women by offering income-generating opportunities and enhancing their socio-economic status. India's cashew exports are highly diversified and cater to a wide range of international markets. The country exports different grades of cashew kernels and value-added products like roasted and flavoured cashews. India's cashew kernels are in demand in countries across the globe, including the United States, European Union nations, Middle East, and Southeast Asia. While the cashew industry in India has seen remarkable growth, it faces challenges such as price fluctuations, supply chain disruptions, and competition from other cashew-producing nations. However, the industry continues to adapt and explore new avenues for value addition, quality improvement, and sustainable practices.

1.3 CASHEW INDUSTRY IN KERALA

The cashew industry in Kerala holds a distinctive position within the state's economic and employment landscape. Renowned for its economic significance and contribution to rural

livelihoods, the cashew industry in Kerala plays a crucial role in the state's agricultural and industrial sectors. The roots of the cashew industry in Kerala can be traced back to the mid-20th century. The industry gained prominence during the 1950s and has since evolved into a pivotal sector for the state's economy. Kerala's climate and geographical conditions are conducive to cashew cultivation, leading to its widespread adoption across various districts, particularly in Kollam. The cashew industry is a major source of employment in Kerala, especially for women from rural and economically marginalized backgrounds. The labour-intensive nature of cashew processing provides opportunities for income generation and livelihood improvement. Women constitute a significant portion of the workforce in cashew factories, involved in activities ranging from shelling to packaging. Kerala's cashew industry contributes significantly to the state's economy through employment generation and export earnings. The industry's impact extends beyond production to ancillary sectors, such as transportation, packaging, and trade. The cashew industry also bolsters the rural economy by providing income opportunities to local communities. Kerala is a prominent player in the international cashew market, exporting cashew kernels to numerous countries. The state's cashew exports contribute to India's overall share in global cashew trade. The export of processed cashew kernels adds to the state's foreign exchange earnings. Despite its achievements, the cashew industry in Kerala faces challenges related to price fluctuations, supply chain issues, and competition from other cashew-producing regions. However, the industry continues to adapt and evolve, exploring avenues for value addition and innovative processing techniques.

1.4 CASHEW INDUSTRY IN KOLLAM

Cashew is the most delicious and nutritious product referred to as “poor man’s crop and rich man’s food” of wide demand all over the world. The kidney shaped fruit’s kernel is available to the consumers in its purest and natural form: that’s why the saying “cashews care for your health”. India remains the prime manufacture, producer, processor, and exporter of cashew nut in the international market.

Kollam district is considered as the center of Cashew industry in Kerala as it is mainly concentrated in this district. The labor-intensive character of traditional industries is evident in cashew industry as it employs more than 1.5 lakh workers and a majority of them (above 90 percent) are women,

thus providing income source to a large number of low-income families. About 11 percent of cashew production and 35 percent of all cashew processing units of India happens to be in Kerala.

Kollam, the cashew capital of India houses many cashew processing units which flourished till the first half of the present decade. The total number of cashew factories in Kerala has been increasing over the year at a fluctuating rate. During 2015-16 period there was about 390 factories in Kerala of which about 352 was in Kollam district. From 2005-06 period the growth trend is at the slow stride, it was around 18% during 2000-01 period and it declined to 6% in 2005-06 period.

The agencies in the state which engaged in cashew processing sector are Kerala State Cashew Development Corporation (KSDC) and Kerala State Cashew Workers Apex Co-operative Society (CAPEX). Kerala State Agency for the expansion of Cashew Cultivation (KSACC), Cashew Export Promotion Council of India (CEPCI), Directorate of Cashew nut and Cocoa Development are the other agencies involved. Under the Kerala State Cashew Development Corporation (KSDC) 30 factories with about 25,867 workers is working and it deals with the processing of raw cashew nuts and producing value added products.

1.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

The financial demands placed on Indian families are increasing daily. The socio-economic hardships simply refer to the hardships arises due to poor socio-economic status and all is related to a specific job. Hardships that result from certain aspects in society and the economy. Some emerging adults who were raised under prolonged conditions of socioeconomic hardship are vulnerable to stress associated with poverty, including a lack of financial and food security and unstable housing (Farah et al., 2006).

1.4. COVID-19 AND CASHEW FACTORY WORKERS

The COVID-19 broke out in 2019 December have eventually spread all over the world. Like any other country, India has also faced many challenges and problems. It mostly caused a negative impact on the casual laborers, especially the rural factory workers. In Kollam district, large part of the rural people engaged in cashew factory labor- especially the woman. This is one of the major sources of employment. And this labor provides women empowerment also. Because the laborers are benefited by ESI, PF and Pensions.

As the income is obtained, the financial stability of the family also got well established. The majority of the workers belong to poor household; hence this labor becomes the sole source of their income. But during the pandemic the life of the rural workers and their family got very hard. Because during the pandemic period the casual workers didn't get access to any other jobs. That's why the financial condition of the family got adverse. They usually don't save any money for the future purposes. This condition had affected them greatly, only one of the partners got the work and the whole errands have to be done with the money earned by the working one. The purpose of this study is to look into various hardships among these cashew factory workers in Kollam district.

1.5. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

About 94 percent of the workers in the industry are women, which makes it all more significant. The cashew industry workers were highly under pressure due to several reasons; one among the major reason is the emergence of COVID- 19. It affects the socio-economic conditions of the laborers.

In one of the research reports titled Issues and Challenges of Cashew Industry in Kerala, submitted to Kerala State Planning Board, tells that the current employment scenario in the industry is also dismal as there is a persistent downfall in the performance of the industry in the years since globalization. This downfall severely batters the workers in the form of falling wages and shrinking number of working days. And in worst case workers are even losing jobs due to the closure of processing unit. The adaptability of the women workers in this sector to the other sector is very low.

The fact that the women are paid on a piece rate reflects the division of labor by gender. When there are no work seasons, men can collect a third of their monthly wage; this is not available to women employees. The piece- rate wage system for women is blatantly exploitative because it forces them to work longer hours and even skip meals and breaks. Just a consolidated rate, which is less than half the minimum wage, is paid to casual workers. The welfare benefits for permanent employees were primarily restricted to gratuity and provident fund (GPF), cashew workers relief welfare fund, health care services at Employees State Insurance (ESI) outlets, and a very small amount of pension, aside from salaries (Thresia, 2007).

During the pandemic period, the life of cashew workers was comparatively miserable. Because at the onset of this pandemic, vaccines were not given at free of cost. Economically it's not possible for them to afford the price of the vaccine. At that time, it's important to get vaccinated; only those who were vaccinated are allowed to enter the factory. Thus, it has created a challenging impact on the workers. Usually, they received salary weekly and the major portion of the wage is used to settle the debts in provision stores and for meeting other basic expenses. The lockdown has made the economic stability imbalanced. When everything went online, they were comparatively not able to provide online assistance to their children for education.

Another important factor that gets affected by Corona wave is the transportation. Normally the workers depend on the public transport system; but during pandemic it become difficult. This study aims to explore the socio-economic hardships experienced by women cashew factory workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The area under study is the Kollam district.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Conducting studies that delve into the life situations of workers in the industrial sector, such as women cashew factory workers, is crucial for understanding their challenges and experiences. Gender-based discrimination must be eradicated, and industries should implement schemes aimed at empowering these workers. While there have been studies focusing on the transformation of the industry and the empowerment of workers, there remains a gap in the literature when it comes to comprehensively addressing the hardships faced by these workers.

Most existing research tends to emphasize broader industry changes or worker empowerment initiatives, with only limited attention given to the day-to-day challenges and difficulties faced by the workers themselves. Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have primarily focused on health-related aspects, leaving a gap in understanding the socio-economic hardships experienced by these workers during the crisis.

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to examine the specific hardships encountered by cashew factory workers, particularly women, while also considering the additional complexities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining their challenges comprehensively, this study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the workers' circumstances and struggles, shedding light on areas that require attention and intervention.

Through the exploration of the workers' experiences during the pandemic, the study aims to uncover a more nuanced perspective of their lives and challenges. This research intends to fill a critical gap in the existing literature by examining not only the broader industry context and empowerment initiatives but also the real-world difficulties faced by these workers daily. Ultimately, the findings of this study can contribute to the development of targeted interventions and policies that address the socio-economic hardships faced by women cashew factory workers, with the goal of improving their well-being and overall quality of life.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The existing literature represents an important element in all research. Through conducting a review of literature, researcher can find out what is already known about the topic and what is to be discussed, research methods applied to the topic etc. (Bryman, 2012). Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview of sources researcher have explored while researching a particular topic (Fink, Arlene. 2014). A literature review helps the researcher in finding and understanding research gap.

James (1981) has focused on the problems faced by Kerala cashew industry workers. The main problem was they do not get enough working days from the unavailability of raw nuts yield and supply and found that workers have been exploited by the management for Dearness Allowance (DA). This means DA is given only when the minimum output produced is ready. The prescribed minimum output is what a worker can produce on an average in a day under below normal working conditions. The study also highlights another problem involved in shelling. As it is done by sitting on the floor and beating nuts with a light hammer, the shell liquid that splashes out in droplets has an abrasive effect on the skin. She concludes that shelling is the most unpleasant job in the cashew industry. Moreover, when the import of raw materials is falling, local nuts that go to the cottage sectors, cannot help cashew factories much to provide more working days.

Cashew workers are employed in processing factory works under conditions that are hazardous for employees. More than the workplace related issues, cashew workers face several hazards that are related to their work. Cashew workers are often exposed to physical hazards like heat and burns, chemical hazards like exposure to skin irritants, biological hazards like various insect bites and diseases caused by bacteria and viruses, ergonomic hazards such as repetitive movements, poor body positioning etc., and psychological hazards such as mental stress and pressure (Kinslin and Kumar, 2019).

The adaptability of the women workers in this sector to another sector is very low. The dependency of rural economy, especially of Kollam, is highly depended on the future of these cashew processing units (Stevelal, 2018).

The study conducted among the workers, trade unions and owners of the business to evaluate the socio-economic situation of cashew workers and reasons for migration of industry to neighboring states based on the primary survey reveal the fact that labor problems and government policies are the reason for migration of industry to other states (Retheesh, 2005).

A study was conducted on the basis of administration of welfare policies in the cashew industry. But then available literature has only touched upon the health problems and challenges of women in this industry. Appraisal of the physical stress, which is essentially required for work improvement, has not been done in any of the studies. The gravity of several other problems related to occupational health has not yet been studied in-dept, and very little effort has been made to improve the work performance and workplace organization (Sudha, 1997).

The intensified study among the cashew workers of Kerala shows that the Malayalee Women of the cashew manufacturing units agonize from greater deprivation and starvation. There has been a widening gap between femininity and masculinity; female workers are one of the most exploited groups. The limitations imposed upon them by poverty and gross unequal power relations, limitations imposed by capital and labor can be reasons for the more pronounced exploitation of female workers over males. It is observed from the study that although women have had the potential for collective power, they continue to suffer discriminatory and humiliating treatment by their employers. At the same time, these limitations are largely overcome by setting the agenda in their trade union. It is also stated in the study that a large number of female cashew factory workers still do not receive the protection of labor laws when it comes to wages, bonuses, maternity leave, pensions. Moreover, employment in cashew factories has been personalized and decentralized. Women have become members of trade unions and participate in strikes and other radical working-class activities. The study concludes that most of the female cashew factory workers are from lower castes, and modernization of cashew workers through trade unions has strengthened the role of women in achieving their basic rights (Lindberg and Anna, 2005).

Deepa (1994) conducted her study to trace the historical background of the cashew industry in India, working conditions of laborers and causes for industrial disaster and women workers in this industry. She has found out that alternative opportunities available for the women workers in agriculture, brick making, constructional work, match industry, petty trade, and some of them found employment as household servants hamper cashew processing work. She also reveals that

the selection of alternative activity as well as the specific kind of activity is determined to a large extent by the caste status of the individual worker.

One of the traditional industries in our nation, the cashew industry in Kerala supports approximately 1.5 lakh women from low-income families. This industry significantly contributes to both rural development and export revenues. Most cashew processing businesses today operate under a variety of restrictions. The “Cashew Capital of Kerala”, Kollam district, is in a dire situation because of the closure of 90% of the processing facilities and the consequent unemployment of the workforce. Examining the sectors current situation and determining the causes of the current crisis are the study’s main goals. The study results in making some recommendations for revitalizing the industry. It emphasizes the requirement for immediate legislative action and policy changes (Parvathy, 2018).

Women play a strong role in the cashew nut processing industries. The female -friendly cashew nut deshelling machines was essential for lowering work stress and accelerating production. The cashew nut deshelling machine comes in a variety of sizes; including, saddle height, crank length, diameter, and handle width were chosen based on the anthropometric measurements of the female workers. Cashew nut splitting and cutting were the intended uses of the crank and slotted lever quick return mechanism. Rest breaks were not required because the developed cashew nut deshelling machine had a “LIGHT” workload. To combat boredom from repetitive work, however, a few brief breaks were allowed (Aware et.al., 2021).

The research study highlighted the socioeconomic and health conditions that women working in cashew industries were facing. Due to India’s declining cashew yield, the cashew processing industry mainly relies on expensive imported raw cashew nuts. Increased processing costs and difficulties maintaining nut quality have a direct impact on the pay, wellbeing, and health of women workers (Madhura, Raghavendra & Ramakrishna. 2020).

The essay assesses the digital financial skills of per-product paid cashew workers. Financial inclusion benefited digital financial services. The ability to transact in digital currency is crucial for the development of emerging economies. The world’s leading engine of innovation, competitiveness, and growth is quickly evolving into the digital economy. Despite the fact that many people have been left out, the long-term potential of the digital economy to advance both financial inclusion and economic growth is enormous. The excluded and undeserved population’s

digital access to and use of formal financial services is described as “digital financial inclusion” by the CGAP (Umabrabha, 2022).

The lockdown related disruptions aftereffect made it harder for the 36.8% of female workers to do their jobs. The organized as well as welfare boards are capable of providing some sort of security to the regular women workers rather than unorganized sectors. Among the total workforce in Kerala only 43% are registered in welfare boards and other employee organizations. In many families, women are the only bread winner and are working tooth and nail to survive; so, authorities are liable to launch inclusive measures to narrow down the hardships and it is imperative to restore the works for a better livelihood. Cashew industry employed 1,07,000 workers in the state with a per day earning of Rs 350. Financial assessment provided evidence about wage loss amounting Rs 7350 per month during the period of lockdown (Priyanka, 2021).

Beevi (1976), study the effect of Kerala’s minimum wage law. It has observed from the study that the initial effect of minimum wage law has raised wage rates in processing units that come under the factory act. She has found that workers daily average salaries increased due to the average fixation of a minimum wage. The average annual salary has fallen because processing activities were switched.

John (1990), in his research, “Problems of Cashew Workers in Kanyakumari District”, has made an effort to pinpoint lower wages and poor working environment affect the interest of cashew laborers in Kerala. The availability of cheap labor, absence of labor problems and availability of raw nuts, low investments, availability of land at low cost, and absence of any intervention motivates the establishment of more and more cashew industries in Kanyakumari district. He suggests that the cashew industry in Tamil Nadu should be brought under Minimum Wages Act, and social welfare measures like Provident Fund, Gratuity, and Employees Security Insurance (ESI) should be made statutory for the development of employees.

In the study, it’s found that, the mobility is a crucial component of any labor market that is ingrained in the minds of labor market participants. Inter-industry and intra-industry mobility are the two main types. The women workers in cashew nut processing industry of this study area have little chance to move to other sectors or industries because there is no other industry similar to the cashew nut processing industry on a larger scale and that too locally accessible; their only option is to become housewives.

The main reason why the female workers were willing to enter the cashew nut plant is the poverty that results from insufficient income. Women enter labor market to save for dowry (to be paid for their or their sister's marriage) a major social institution in the region. The entry to cashew nut labor market is very simple and one needed only the introduction of the neighbor or relatives. The process of learning new skills is also simple; on an average it took 34 days to learn the skills in the industry. Though there is no direct cost involved in training workers, competition among the employers is leading to changes in recruitment and workers are brought by the new entrepreneurs and exploited (Srinivasan, Ateeq, Jayanthi. 1999).

Studies also indicate the prevalence of low literacy rates among cashew workers (Kannan, 1978; Government of India, 1982). In fact, one of the suggestions by the committee appointed in 1953 by the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin state (which later become the part of Kerala), to fix minimum wages in the industry, was to promote education among the workers; initiatives for this were to be taken by the government, trade unions, employers and adult education organizers (Government of Travancore-Cochin, 1953). However, as indicated by the studies available till the mid-1980s, improvement in education seems to be minimal.

In the 1980s, the Labor Bureau (Government of India, 1982) undertook a study on the working and living conditions of workers in the cashew nut processing industry in Kerala. The survey found that 93 percent of the women were engaged in shelling and peeling of cashew nuts on a piece rate basis and the remaining on a time rate basis as graders. The male workers engaged mainly in borma, roasting, packing, etc. received a higher pay and on a time rate basis. The survey found the existence of social security benefits like PF, pension, gratuity and maternity benefits. The survey observed the absence of welfare officers in some units and work committees in any factory. In order to provide work throughout the year which could improve the plight of the cashew workers, the report suggested that the industry should make efforts to bring in more raw nuts for processing. The suggestion deserves attention as even in the mid-1990s it was observed that employment in factories was restricted to 100 days in a year (Deepa, 1994).

Rajanbabu (1999), criticizes the policy of the government relating to cashew industry. In his opinion, the increase in minimum wages is neither helping the employees nor the industry but it helps to improve the 'Kudivarappu', the unauthorized processing of cashew in small sheds with low wages and without giving statutory benefit to the employees. The same employees in

organized sector are working in unorganized sector for getting employment where the wages are very low in addition to the leakage of the tax revenue. Hence it is high time to frame appropriate laws, which are industry friendly then only the industry, its workers and the government will be benefitted.

Lindberg (2001) examined the life of female cashew workers in Kerala by analyzing the role of cashew factories, trade unions and marriage in the formation of identities based on class, caste and gender. She looked at the connections between gender ideology, gender discourses, and social struggles that have impacted on the life of workers. According to the survey, only women perform all labor-intensive tasks at piece rate, while men are paid on a monthly basis. According to Lindberg, from 1953 to 1998, the income disparity between men and women actually grew, and women workers were treated differently for many processes based on their caste. She claims that trade unions are totally male dominated and women workers increasingly distrust their leaders. Based on her analysis of the cashew processing sector, she finds that widespread unemployment contributed to preserve the caste division of labor in the state.

Grover (1988) points out women in cashew factories face a variety of health hazards in day-to-day life. Those get aggravated by other problems like poverty, poor wages, unsatisfactory working conditions, and the failure of the employers to implement different welfare measures. Though the chain of circumstance relationship on environmental factors of the good health of workers, and some realistic appraisal of their predicament can be expected.

Rajan & Binilkumar (2004) highlights on their study about the weakness, opportunities, and threats in the cashew industry. It shows that youngsters are unwilling to work in the manual shelling process owing to the social status of workers in the industry, comparatively lower wages. The prevalence of strong trade unions and lack of sufficient stockyard for raw nuts are the other areas of concern. The study also points out that under cultivation of cashew nuts annually results in reduced production of raw cashew nuts.

The fallout ensued of the disruption related to lockdown exacerbated the work of 36.8% female workers engaged in sectors which are run at a high risk. Among the total women workforce in Kerala only 43% are registered in welfare boards and other employee organizations. The lack of awareness among the people and the regulations laid down by the government restricted the unregistered group in availing the benefits of various aids launched by government. More over in

many families, women are the only bread winner and are working tooth and nail to survive. So authorities are liable to launch inclusive measures to narrow down the hardships and it is imperative to restore the works for a better livelihood (Priyanka, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on various aspects of society, including the livelihoods and well-being of vulnerable populations, such as women cashew workers. Studies have shown that the pandemic and its associated lockdowns have exacerbated existing socio-economic disparities, disproportionately affecting informal workers in the agricultural sector (Smith et al., 2020).

Research conducted by Sharma and Verma (2021) in the context of rural India highlighted that woman engaged in cashew processing faced significant challenges during the pandemic. The closure of processing units and disruptions in the supply chain led to a loss of income for many women who relied on daily wages. The study also emphasized the lack of social safety nets and access to healthcare, making these women particularly vulnerable to economic shocks.

A study by Nguyen et al. (2020) in Southeast Asia indicated that the pandemic led to reduced demand for cashew products in global markets, resulting in decreased income for women involved in cashew processing. The lack of financial reserves and limited access to credit further compounded their difficulties, highlighting the need for targeted support to sustain their livelihoods.

Gender-based disparities in the cashew industry were magnified during the pandemic. Research by Patel and Das (2020) highlighted how women cashew workers often faced unequal wages and poor working conditions even before the pandemic. The crisis exacerbated these disparities, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive policies to ensure equitable recovery and sustainable livelihoods.

In conclusion, the available literature indicates that women cashew workers faced profound socio-economic hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic. These hardships were compounded by pre-existing gender inequalities and systemic vulnerabilities. To mitigate the impact of future crises on this population, it is crucial to address not only the immediate economic challenges but also the underlying structural issues.

2.2. RESEARCH GAP

There are many studies that have explored socio-economic hardships in various sectors, but there is a scarcity of research that specifically delves into the challenges faced by women cashew factory workers. Most studies on the cashew industry tend to address its transformation and worker empowerment, with only a limited number of studies touching on the impact of COVID-19 on hardships, mainly focusing on health aspects. Given this gap in the literature, the present study provides a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic hardships experienced by women working in cashew factories. By focusing on this specific group and considering the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, research aims to unveil a detailed and nuanced perspective of their situation. Thus, the research not only fill a gap in the existing body of knowledge but also to bring attention to the voices and experiences of women cashew factory workers who have been relatively understudied. By investigating both their socio-economic hardships and their situation during the pandemic, the research uncovers insights that can lead to targeted interventions and support measures, ultimately improving the well-being and livelihoods of these workers.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate and assess the socio-economic hardships experienced by cashew workers, with a focus on the design, data sources, data collection, and data analysis processes employed in this quantitative study.

3.2. TITLE OF THE STUDY

UNVEILING SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS FACED BY WOMEN CASHEW WORKERS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS

3.3. OBJECTIVES

General Objective

To examine the Socio-Economic Hardships Among women Cashew Workers in Kollam District During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Specific Objectives

- To study the socio-demographic profile of the women cashew workers.
- To understand the challenges faced by women cashew workers due to family responsibilities.
- To study the impact of loss of employment due to lockdown.
- To understand the difficulties faced by women cashew workers during COVID-19.
- To identify the role of trade unions and management in combating these challenges.
- To assess the relationship between health and financial hardship during the pandemic.

3.4. HYPOTHESIS

- Financial hardship will increase with the increase in bad condition of health.
- There is a positive influence of trade unions and management in facing these challenges.

3.5. VARIABLES

Dependent variable: Socioeconomic hardships

Independent variable: Health, trade union & management

3.6. RESEARCH STRATEGY

The study on understanding the socio-economic hardships among women cashew factory workers, the quantitative research strategy is employed to provide a rigorous and empirical assessment of the challenges they face. Bryman (2001) argue that quantitative research approach is the research that places emphasis on numbers and figures in the collection and analysis of data. Quantitative research is described as the collection of numerical data and has an objectivist conception of social reality (Bryman, 2012). The current study is conducted to understand the socioeconomic hardships among women cashew factory workers. As the study looks for an objective nature, quantitative research is being used.

3.7. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used in the study is survey design. According to Creswell (2012), survey designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. The type of survey design used here is cross-sectional survey. The cross-sectional designs are used to collect data about current attitudes, opinions, or beliefs.

3.8. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Theoretical definition

Socio-economic hardship: Socio-economic hardships are hardships that result from certain aspects in society and the economy. Some emerging adults who were raised under prolonged conditions of socioeconomic hardship are vulnerable to stress associated with poverty, including a lack of financial and food security and unstable housing (Farah et.al., 2006).

Operational definition

Socioeconomic hardship refers to the hardship arises due to poor socio-economic status and all is related to a specific job. In the context of this research, the term "socio-economic hardship" refers to the tangible and intangible challenges and difficulties experienced by women cashew workers within the Kollam district's cashew industry due to their socio-economic status. These hardships

encompass a range of factors, including limited access to resources, financial constraints, inadequate living conditions, reduced employment opportunities, and gender-based inequalities. Socio-economic hardships manifest as measurable indicators such as low- income levels, lack of access to healthcare, limited educational opportunities, and disparities in working conditions. These difficulties are often exacerbated by external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which can further impact the socio-economic well-being of these women.

3.9. AREA AND UNIVERSE OF STUDY

Area of the study

The area of study is Kollam district. The study is based on the women cashew factory workers of Kollam district. Kollam is taken as the area of study as it has the largest number of cashew factories in Kerala.

Universe of the study

All women cashew workers have constituted as the universe of study.

Unit of the study

A single Woman cashew factory worker under management sector of Kollam district is considered as the unit of the study.

3.10. PILOT STUDY

The researcher conducted pilot study in Kollam district to understand the feasibility of the research. To make this possible the researcher had a meeting with the management of the factories and five cashew workers regarding the area of research. The plan is to pose various questions to get an idea from their response.

3.11. PRETEST

The pretest was conducted by the researcher among six cashew workers of Kollam district to check the relevance of the tool of data collection.

3.12. SAMPLING

Kilikollur, Chandanathope, and Puthoor are chosen as the areas of focus due to their substantial representation of the cashew industry in Kerala. These three places together constitute half of the cashew industries in Kerala. This selection allows for insights that are likely to be indicative of the broader industry challenges and experiences in the state. As there is an increased number of respondents present, 60 women cashew workers were selected from these three places. The respondents were selected by purposive sampling method.

3.13. SOURCE OF DATA

Primary data

The primary data was collected directly from the respondents with the help of an interview schedule.

Secondary data

The secondary data was collected from sources like journals, articles, etc.

3.14. TOOL OF DATA COLLECTION

Interview schedule was used as the tool for collecting the data. To assess the socio-demographic details of cashew factory workers, analyze the impact of lockdown, to understand the challenges faced by cashew workers due to family responsibilities, to know about the COVID-19 related difficulties the workers have to face and to understand the role of trade unions and management in combating these issues happened due to the pandemic, a self-prepared interview schedule was used.

3.15 DATA COLLECTION

Researcher collected the data from 60 women cashew factory workers from during the months from February to May 2023. During these periods the researcher meet the workers as well as the management for getting the respective information.

3.16. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was done with the help of SPSS. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are used in the study. Frequency analysis is an important sector of statistics and this deals with the number of occurrences and analyzes measures of central tendencies which include mean, median, mode, etc., measures of dispersion, etc. Correlation indicates the extent to which two or more variables fluctuate in relation to each other. This study used Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), which is a measure of the linear or straight-line relationship between two interval level variables (Elifson, 1998)

3.17. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The availability of women cashew workers for the interview and transportation to the area of study were found to be difficult.

CHAPTER IV

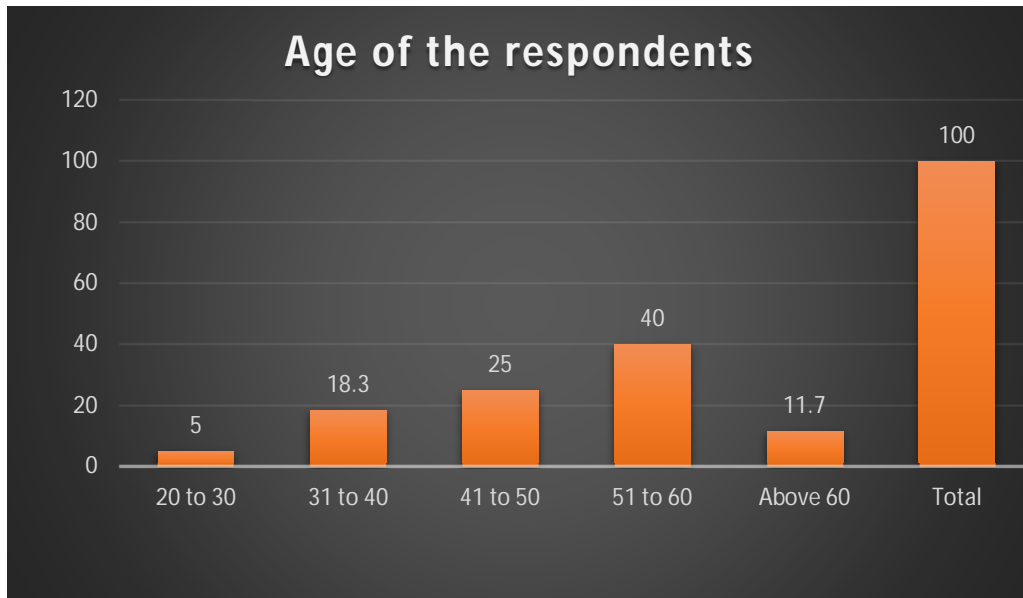
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the analysis and interpretation of data. It helps in reviewing data and arriving at relevant conclusions using various analytical methods. The current study aims to analyse the socioeconomic hardships among cashew workers. The information collected through the interview schedule was analysed and interpreted as per the objectives of the study.

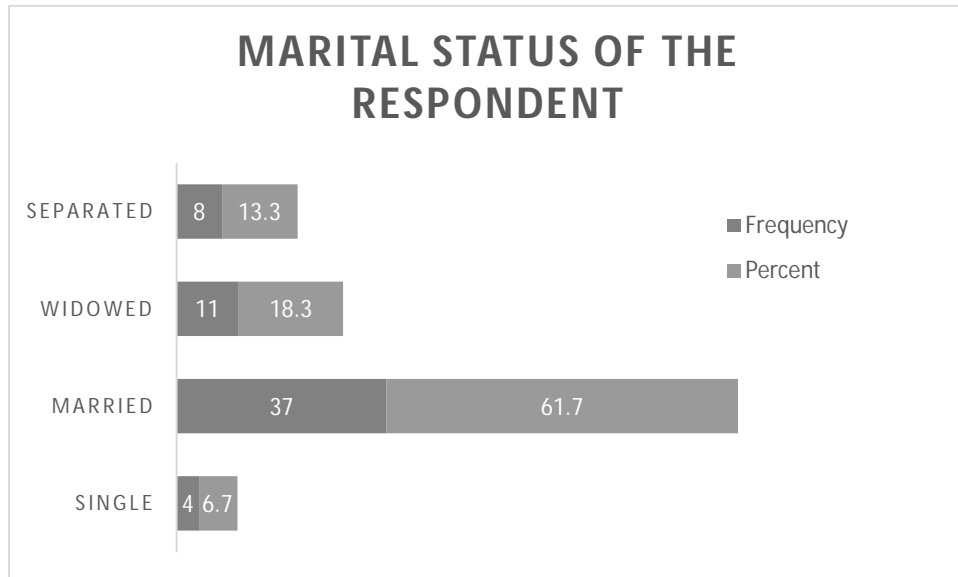
4.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Figure 1. Age of the respondents



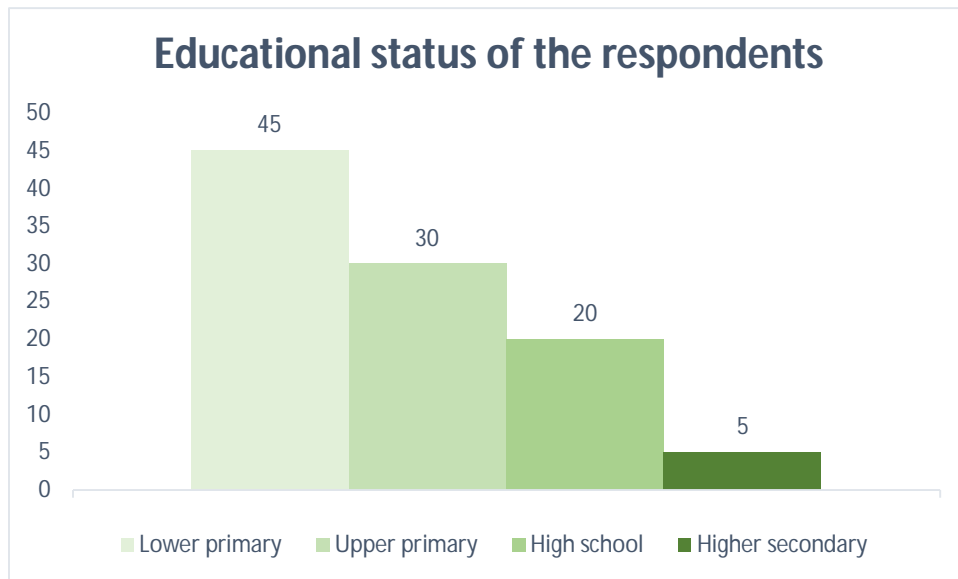
The above figure shows the distribution of respondents by their age group. It shows that the highest were from the age group 51 to 60, which is 40% and least were in the age group 20 to 30 and its 5%.

Figure 2. Marital status of the respondent



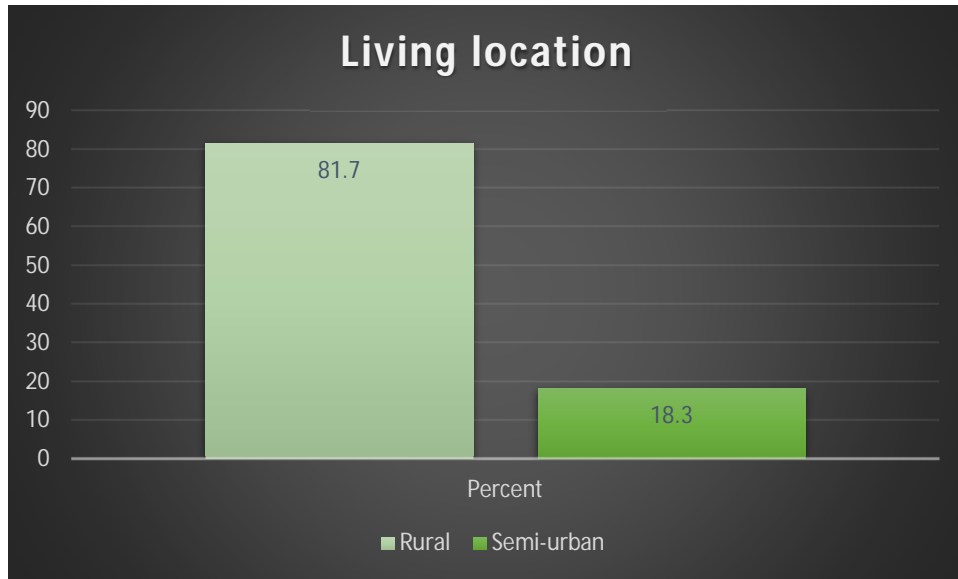
The above graph describes the distribution of the respondents by their marital status and it shows that 37 were married, 11 widowed, 8 separated and 4 single. Most of them were married.

Figure 3. Educational status of the respondent



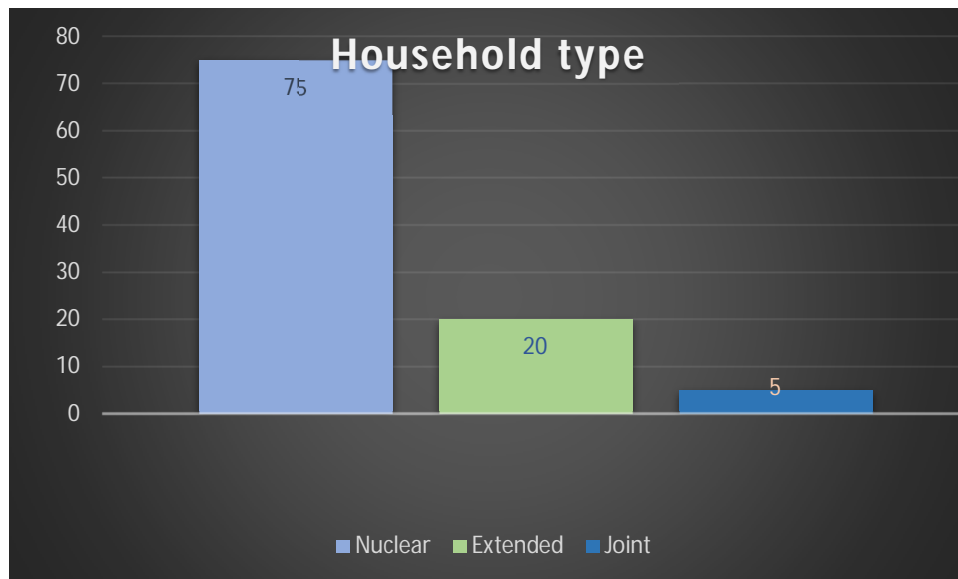
The above graph depicts the educational status of the respondents and it shows that 45% attained lower primary education, 30% got upper primary education, 20% have high school education and only 5% were higher secondary qualified.

Figure 4. Living location



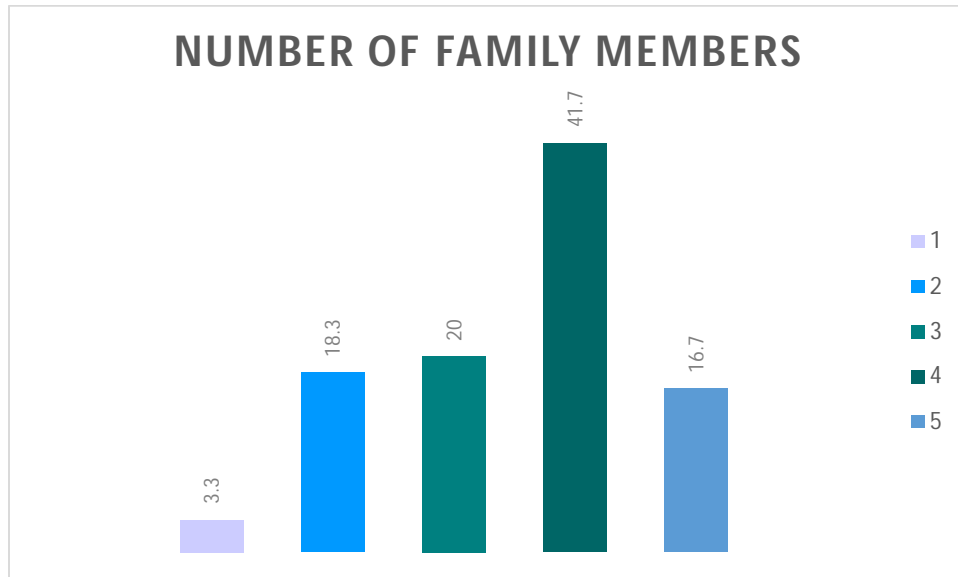
The above figure makes it clear that the 81.7% of respondents lives in the rural area, while the rest 18.3% were from urban area.

Figure 5. Type of household



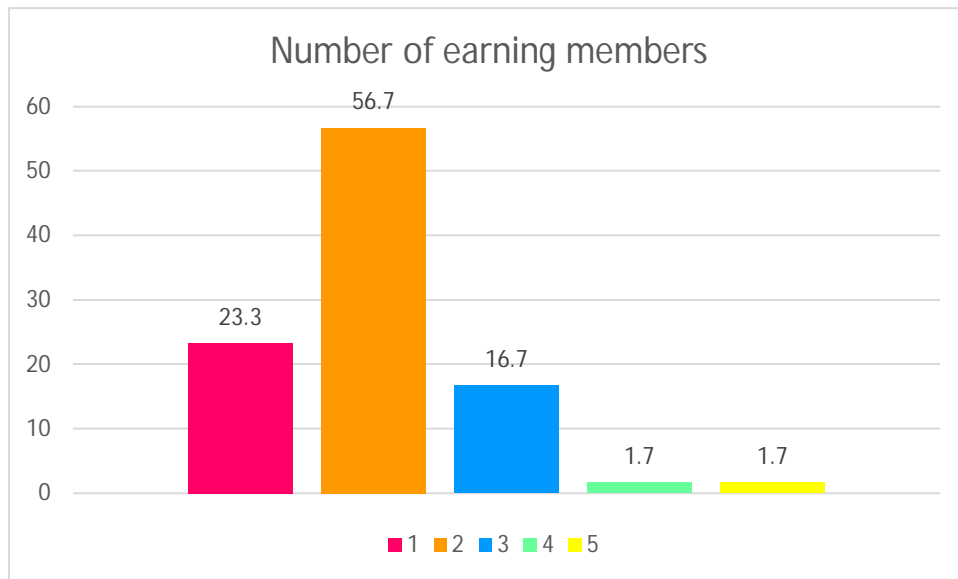
The above graph shows the type of household of the respondents. Majority of 75% belongs to nuclear family, 20% belong to extended family and the rest 5% belong to joint family.

Figure 6. Number of family members



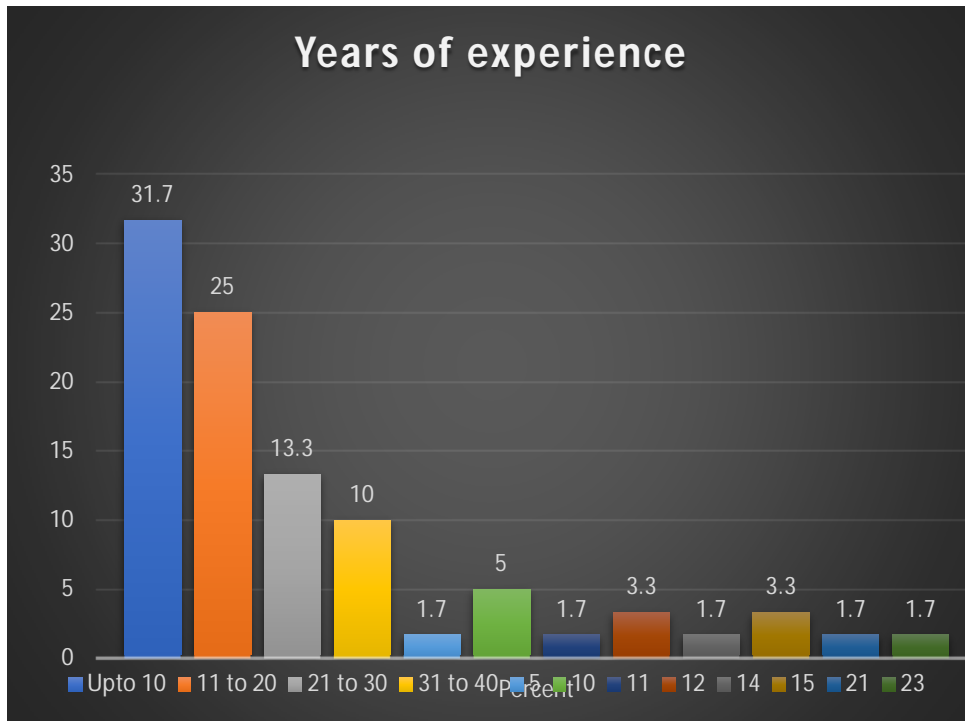
The above graph shows the distribution of family members. Majority of the respondents' families were consisting of 4 members each and the percentage is 41.7%.

Figure 7. Number of earning members



The above graph shows the number of earning members in the family of respondents. Majority of families have 2 earning members, and the percentage of families having two earning members is 56.7%. The families having 4 and 5 number of earning members are of 1.7% and it's the least among this.

Figure 8. Years of work experience



The above chart shows the years of work experience of the respondents. Majority of 31.7% have a work experience of 10 years and below. 25% worked for around 11 to 20 years. 13.3% have around an experience of 21 to 30 years and the rest 10% have an experience of 31 to 40 years.

4.3. CHALLENGES FACED DUE TO FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

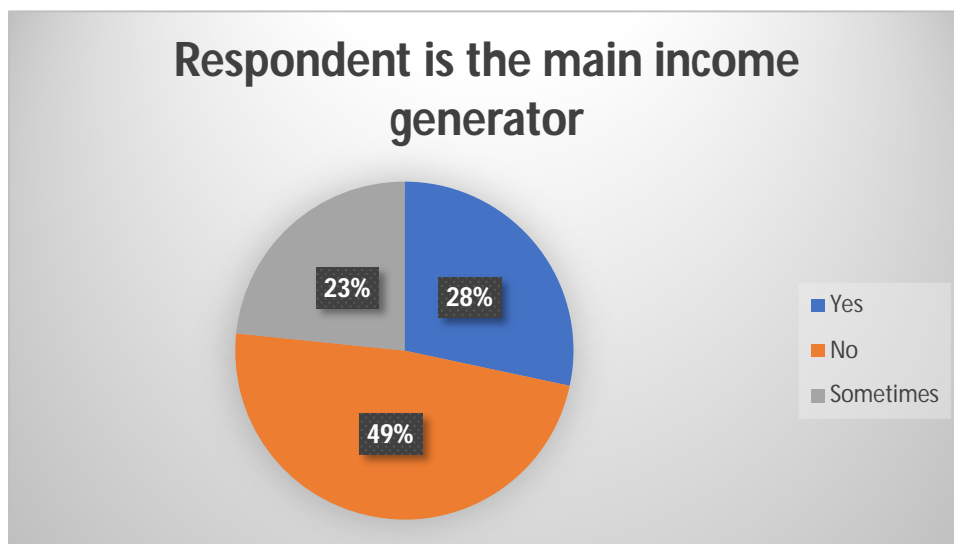


Figure 9. Primary income generator

The pie-chart denotes that among the respondents 28% were the main income generator and 23% act as main income generator during sometimes. Only the rest 49% weren't the primary income generator.

Income satisfaction

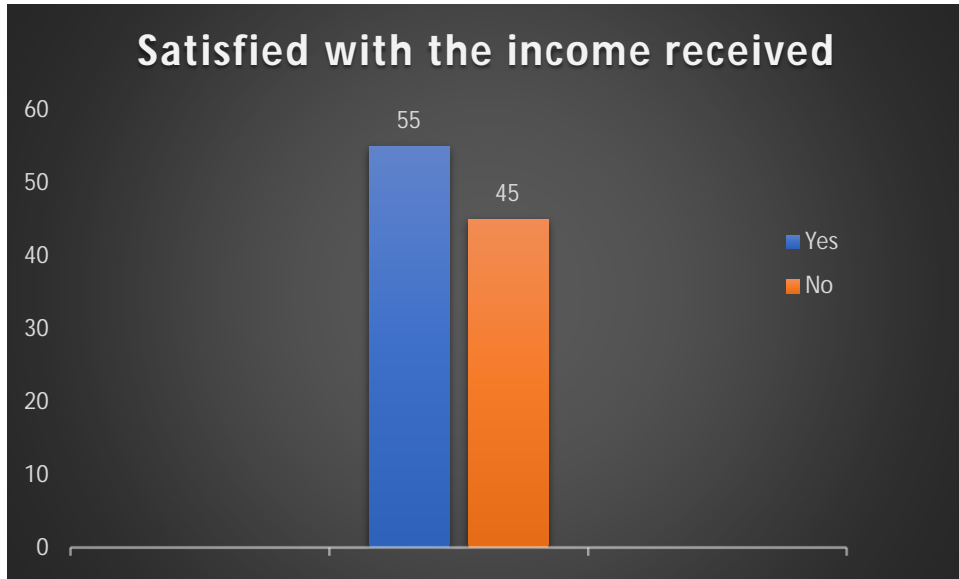


Figure 10. Income satisfaction

The graph shows that within the respondents 55% were satisfied with the income they received and the 45% weren't satisfied with the income provided.

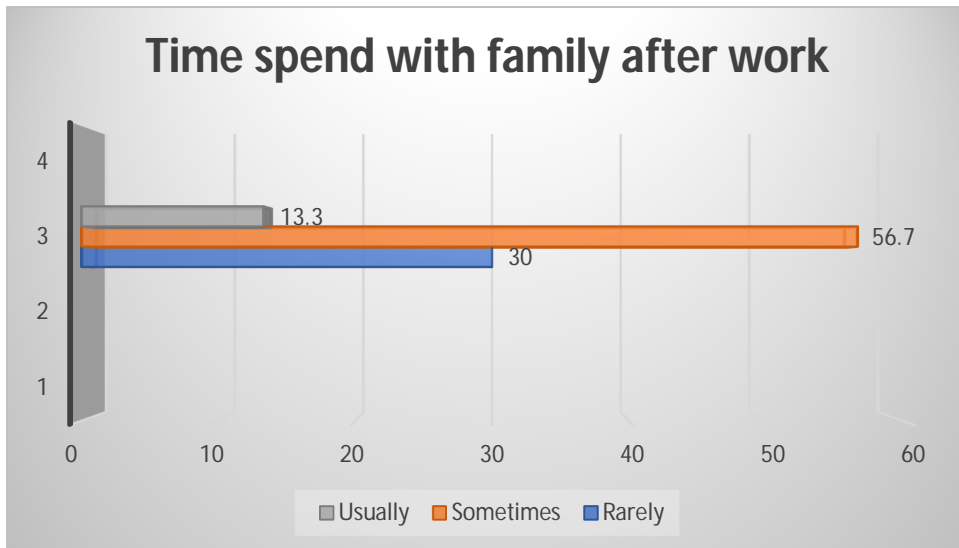


Figure 11. Time spends with family

The above figure shows that the respondents usually doesn't get time to spend with their family, only 13.3% usually get the time. 30% rarely get the time with their family. 56.7% sometimes get the chance to spend time with their family.

Discrimination faced

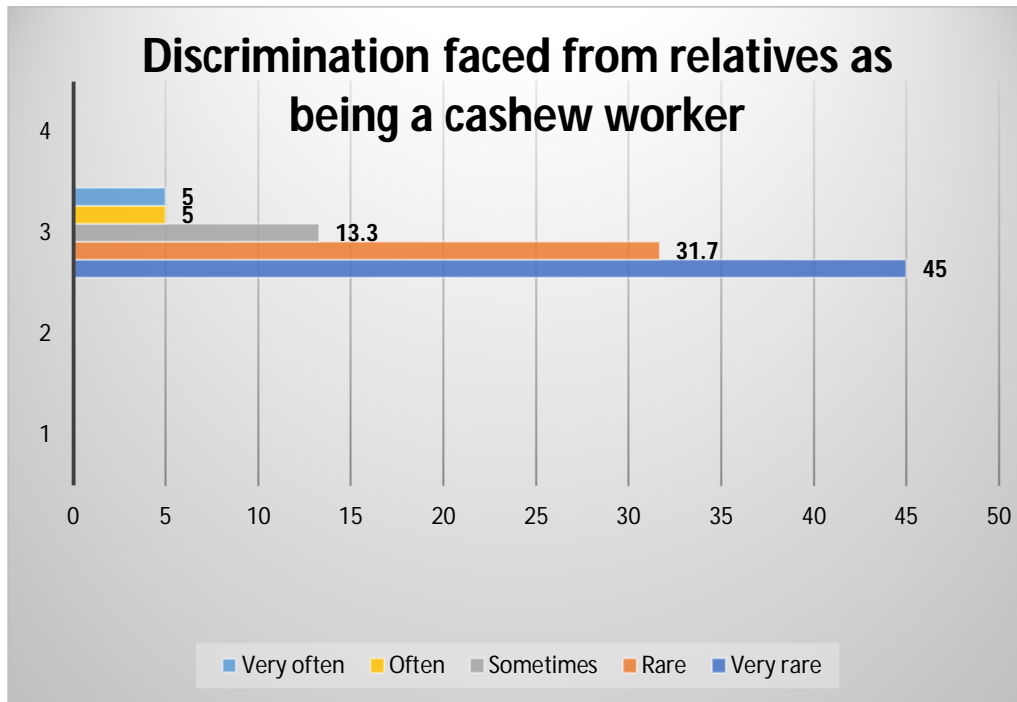


Figure 12. Discrimination faced

The above chart represents the discrimination faced by cashew workers from their relatives. 45% responded that they very rarely face the discrimination and only the 5% responded that they face the discrimination often and very often. Only 13.3% faces the discrimination sometimes.

Response to whether they are able to participate in family programs

43.3% agreed that they weren't able to participate in family programs due to work responsibility. Only 1.7% strongly disagreed that they were available to participate in family programs.

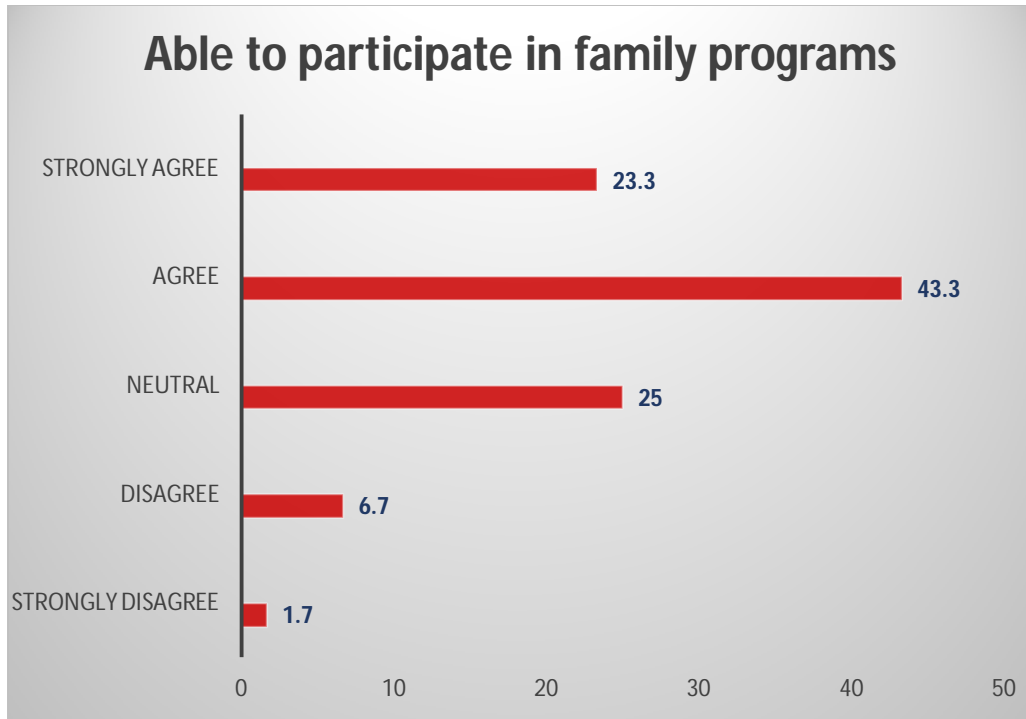


Fig 13 Response to whether they are able to participate in family programs

4.4. DIFFICULTIES FACED DURING COVID-19

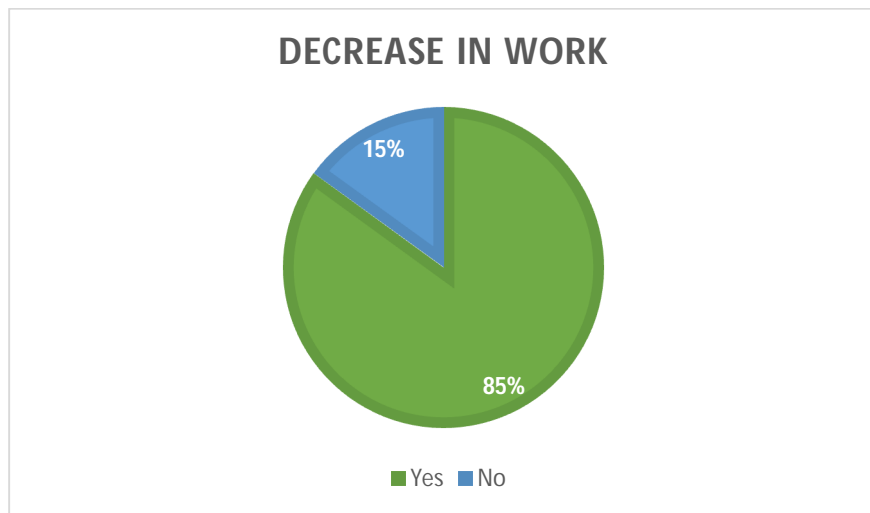


Figure 14. Decrease in work

The above diagram depicts that 85% face decrease in work when compared to the pre-pandemic period and the rest 15% doesn't face any decrease in work.

Remuneration received

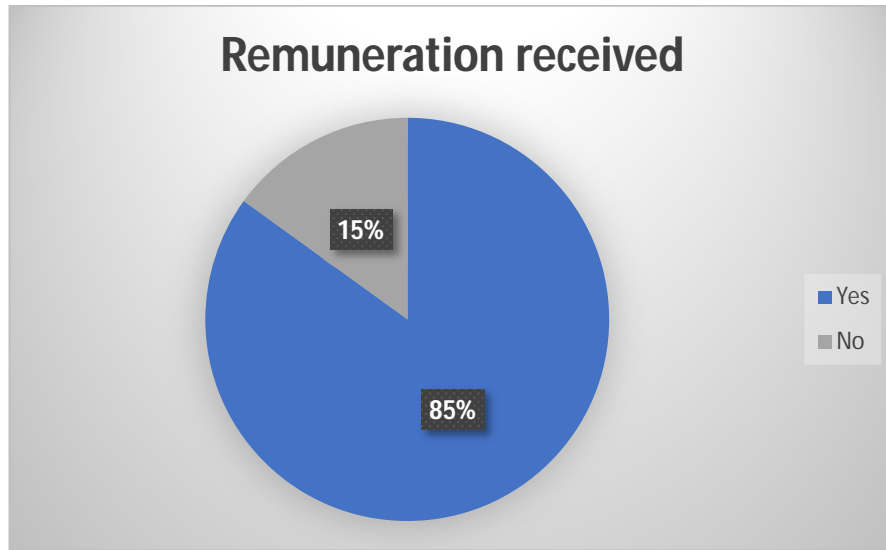


Figure 15. Remuneration received

The graph shows that whether the remuneration is received properly during the lockdown period. 15% responded that they don't receive the salary properly.

Usual working hours

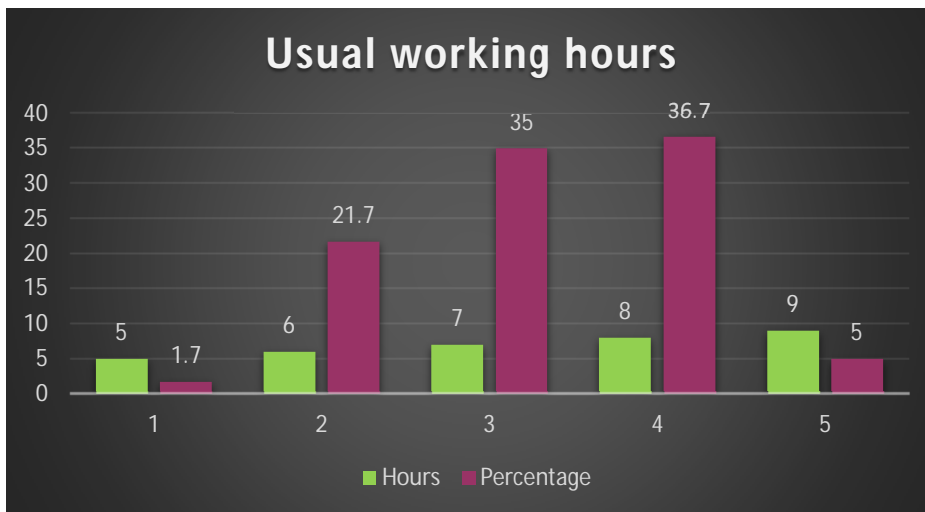


Figure 16. Usual working hours

The graph depicts the usual working hours. Majority among them usually work for about 8 hours. The least working hours is 5 and 1.7% belongs to this category.

Work loss during pandemic

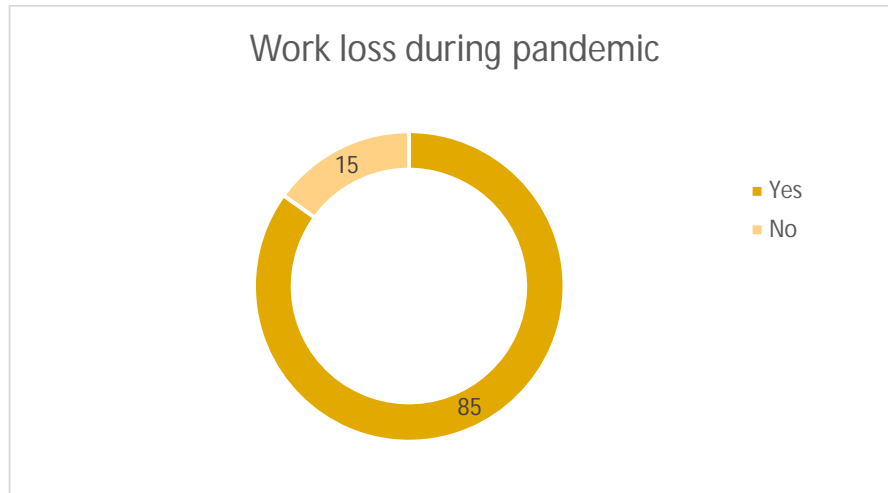


Figure 17. Work loss during pandemic

The chart shows whether there is any case of loss of work due to pandemic and it's noticed that 85% face loss of work.

Reduction in working time

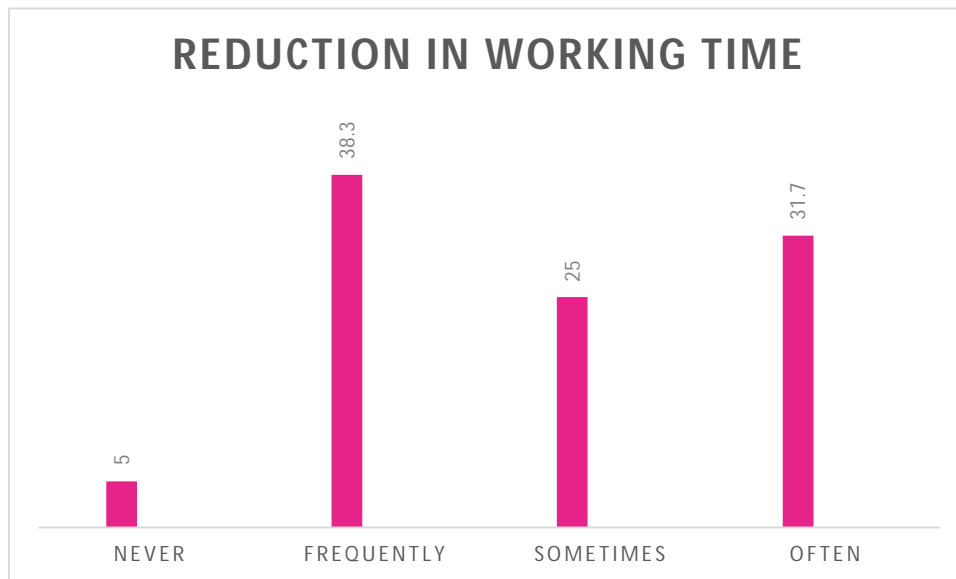


Figure 18. Reduction in working time

The graph shows about the reduction in working hours. 38.3% frequently face reduction in working hours and 31.7% often faces reduction in work. Only 5% never face any reduction in work.

Work shift

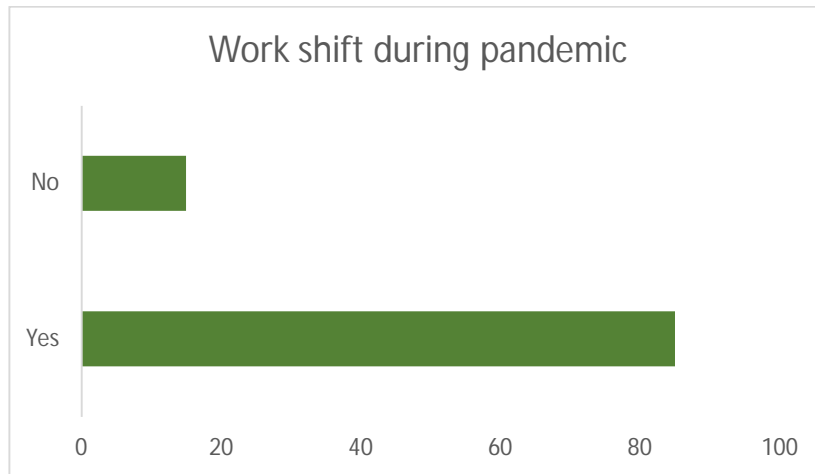


Figure 19. Work shift

The graph shows whether they face any work shift during the pandemic period. 85% have work shift during the corona time.

Traffic difficulties faced

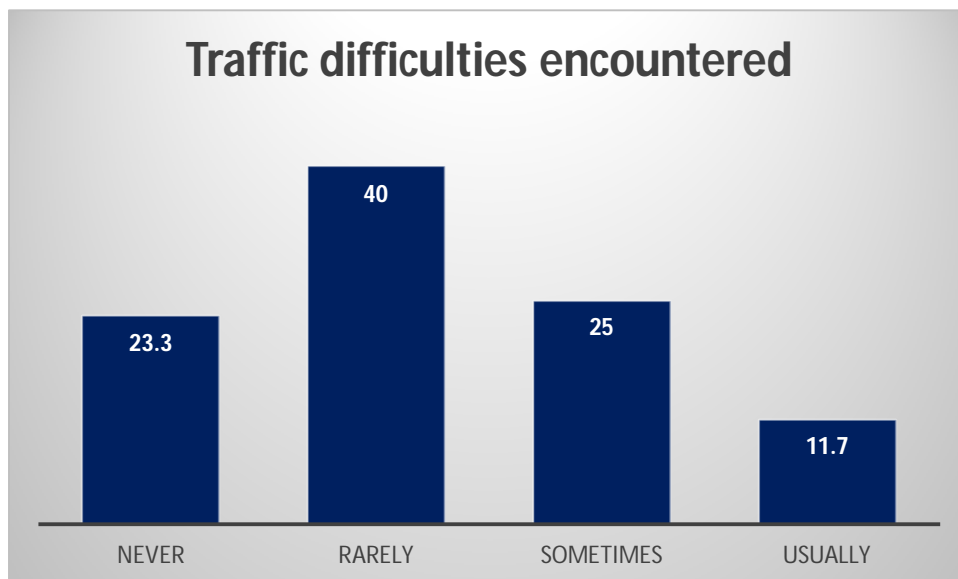


Figure 20. Traffic difficulties faced

The bar chart shows that only the 23.3% never faced any traffic difficulty. The rest faced the traffic difficulties because public transportation is not provided during the lockdown period. Majority of them chooses the cashew industry near to their location, so that they can get there by walk.

Difficulty in getting vaccine

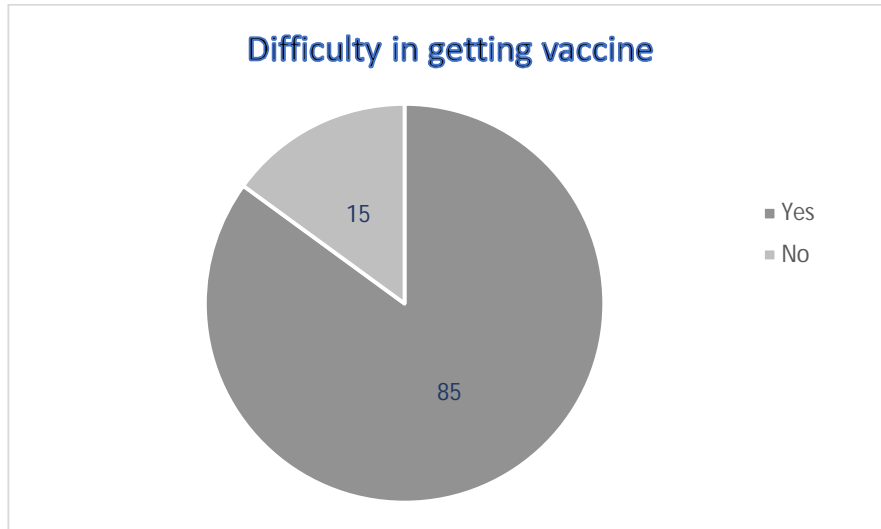


Figure 21. Difficulty in getting vaccine

The chart shows that about 85% face difficulty in getting vaccine during the initial time, because at that time vaccine is not provided freely. Also many of them were not aware about the vaccine and its benefit.

Health problems faced during pandemic

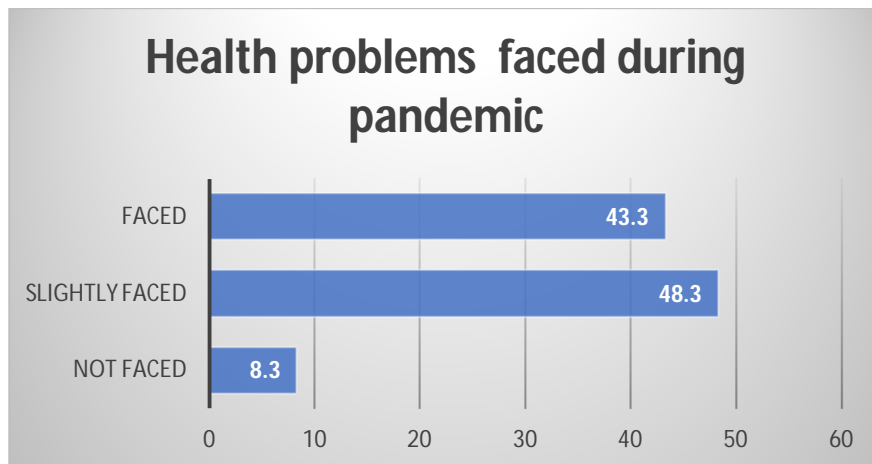


Figure 22. Health problems faced during pandemic

The chart shows about the health problems faced by the respondents during the pandemic period. 43.3% responded that their health was affected, 48.3% responded that they were slightly affected and only 8.3% responded that their health was not affected.

Effects in health

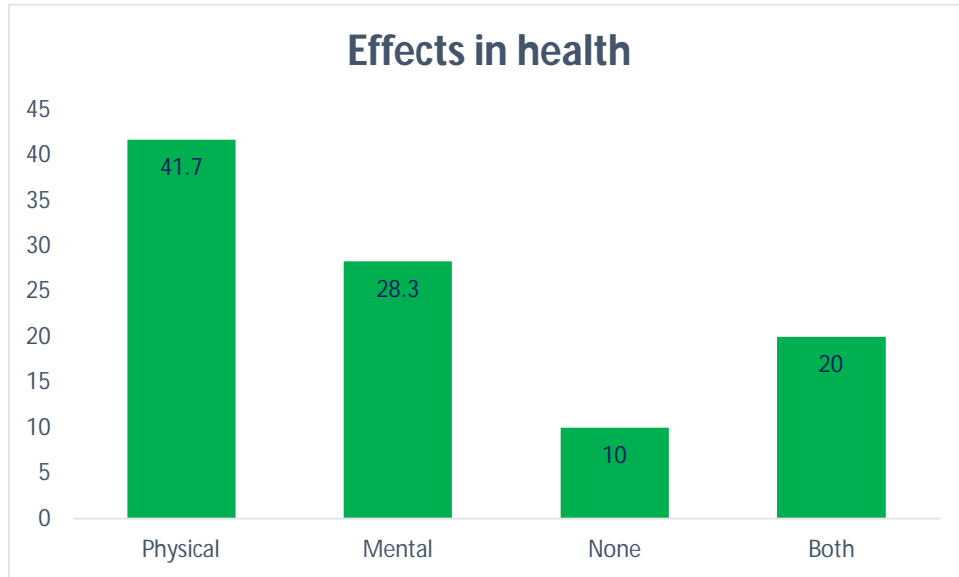


Figure 23. Effects in health

The graph shows about how the health of the respondents is affected. 41.7% responded that they were affected physically, 28.3% were affected mentally and 20% affected by both physically and mentally. Only 10% were only not affected by any kind of diseases.

Relation between bad health and earning



Figure 24. Relation between bad health and earning

The graph shows about the relation between bad health and earning among the respondents. 40% shows that there is a high relation between bad health and earning. 13% represents that there is only a low relation between bad health and earning.

4.5. IMPACT OF LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT

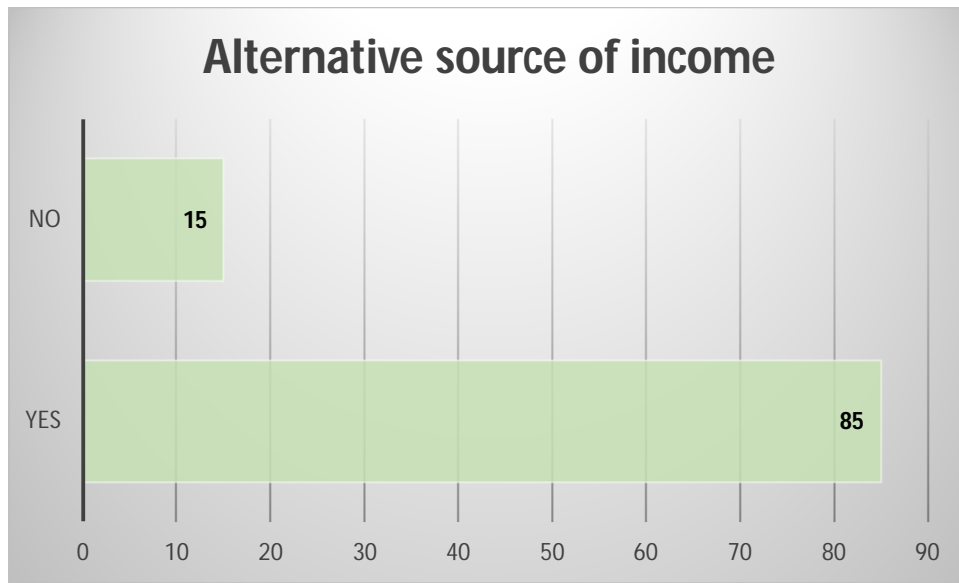


Figure 25. Alternative source of income

The graph shows that 85% of the respondents found an alternative source of income, because many of them were the primary income generator of the family. 15% only depend on the cashew industry for the job.

Other earning member

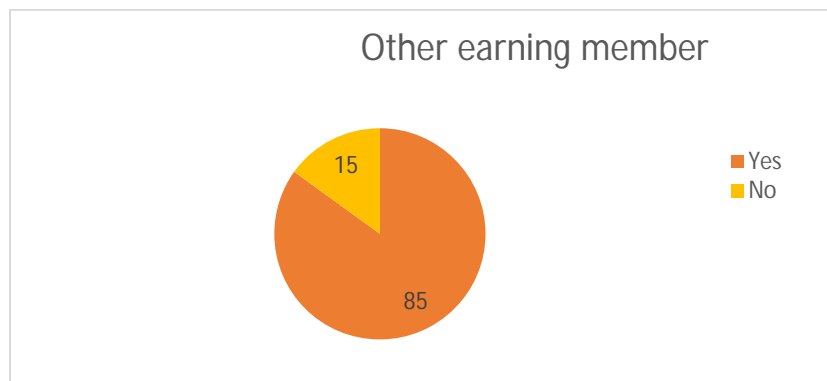


Figure 26. Other earning member

The chart shows that 85% of the respondent's family have other earning member and 15% were the only earning member of the family.

Difficulty in finding other source of income

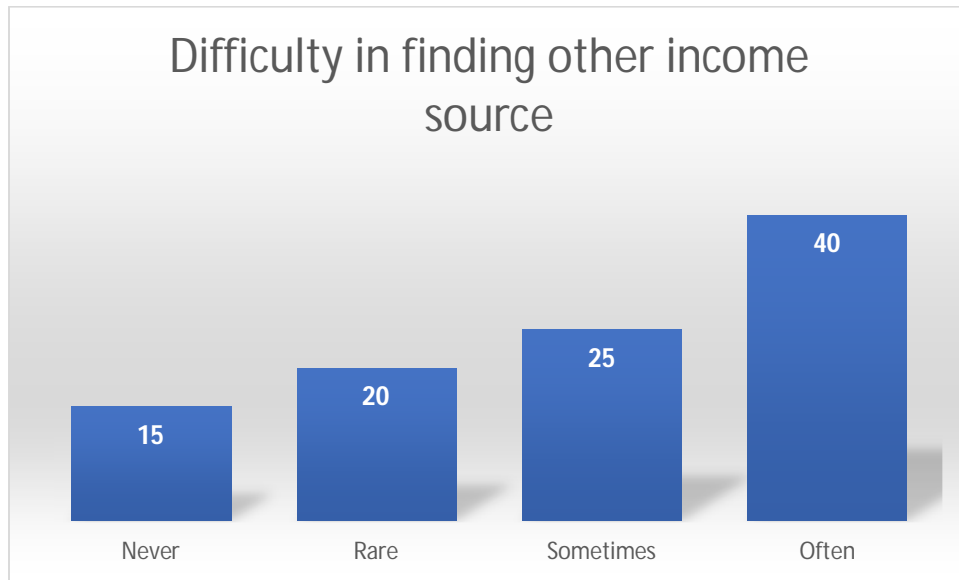


Figure 27. Difficulty in finding other source of income

The graph shows the difficulty faced while finding any other source of income. Only 15% never faced any difficulties while finding other source of income.

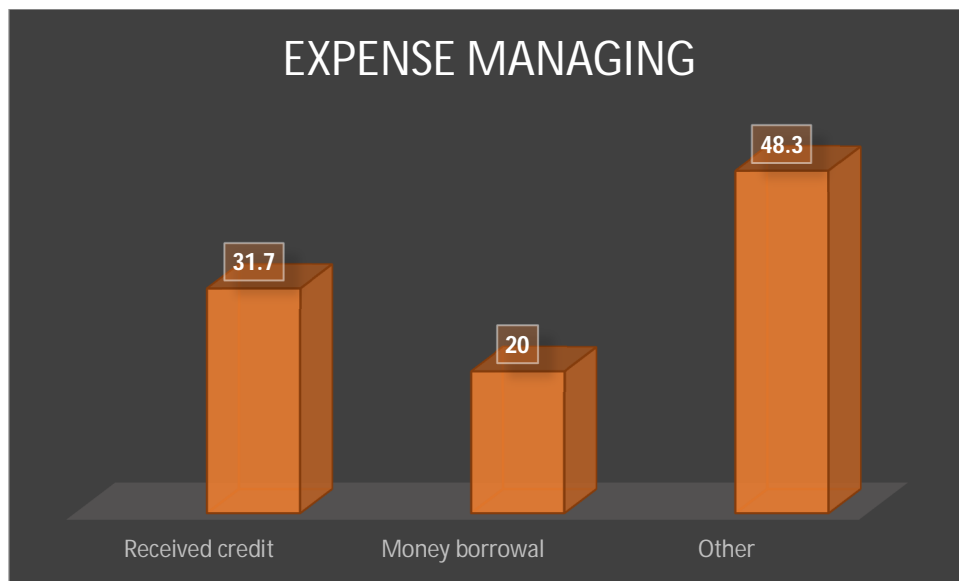


Figure 28. Expense meet

The graph shows the way by which the respondents managed to deal with the expenses during the period of unemployment. 31.7% meet the expense by receiving credit, 20% by borrowing money and the rest by other such means.

Response to whether had any bank loan or chitty

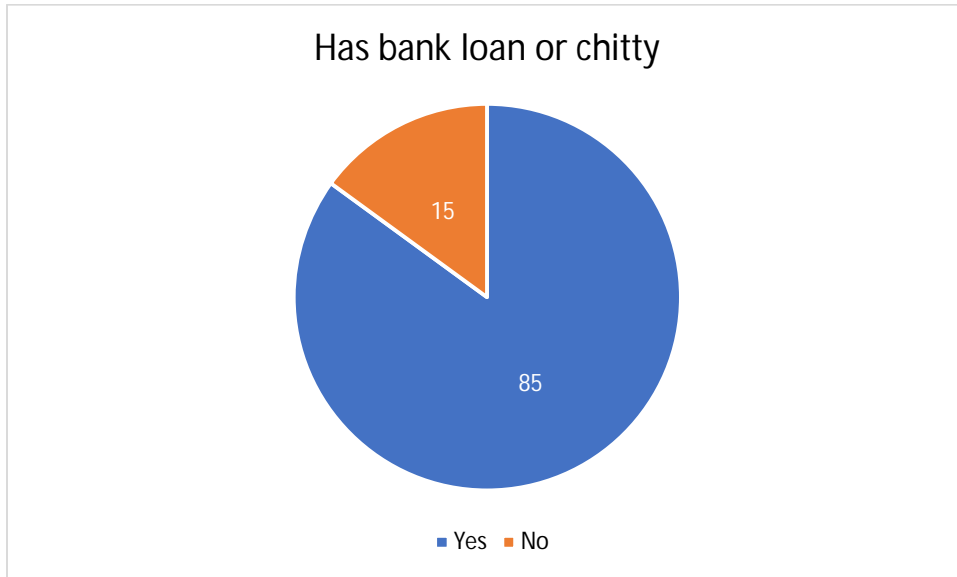


Figure 29. Response to whether had any bank loan or chitty

The graph depicts that majority of them had bank loans or chitty; only 15% doesn't have loans or chitty.

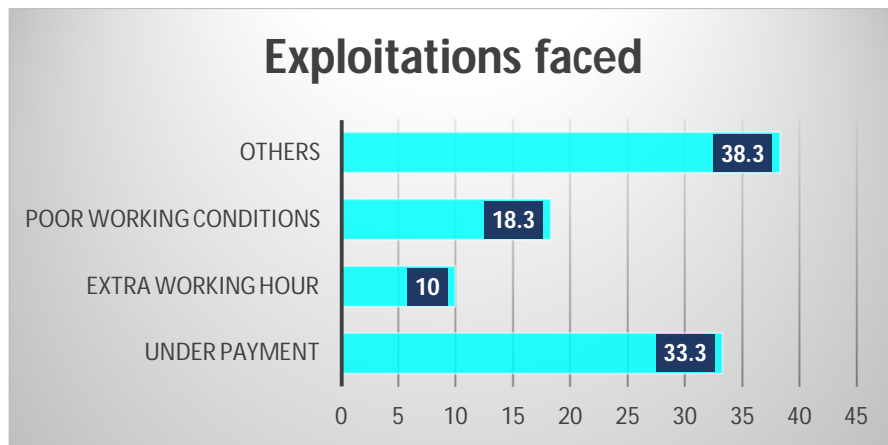


Figure 30. Exploitations faced

The chart shows that due to the shortage of unskilled jobs, 33.3% of respondents faced under payment. Some of them also faces extra working hour, poor working conditions, etc.

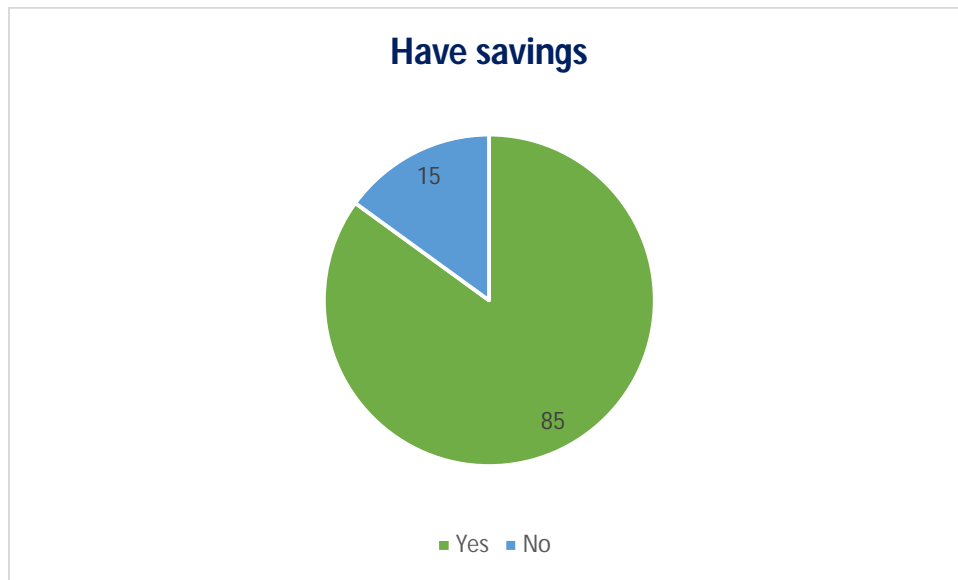


Figure 31. Response to whether have savings or not

The chart shows that among the respondents 85% had savings in their bank account.

4.6. ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS AND MANAGEMENT IN COMBATING CHALLENGES



Figure 32. Response to whether the trade union is active

The graph shows the response of the respondents regarding the activeness of trade union. 85% responded that the trade union was active in their cashew industry and 15% responded that the trade union is not active.

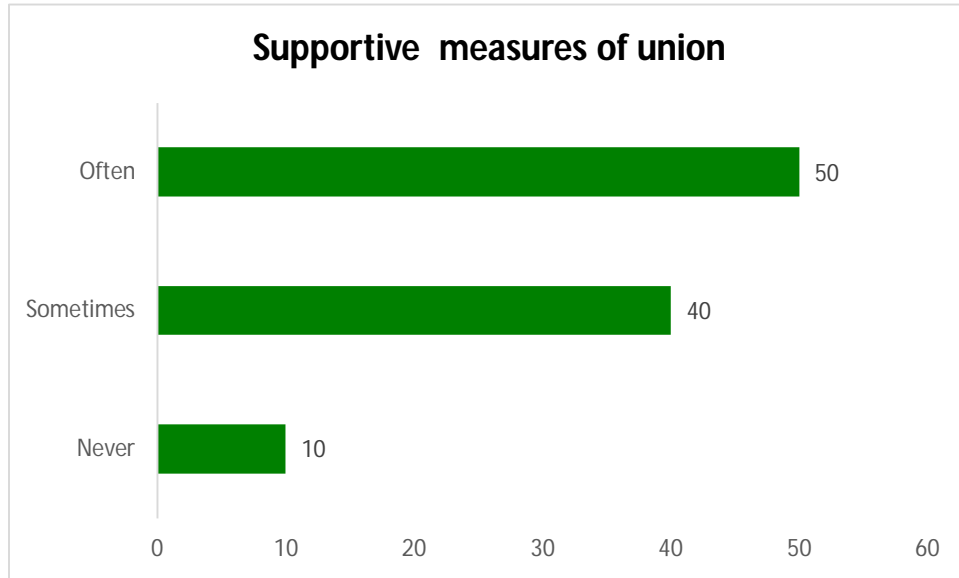


Figure 33. Supportive measures of union

The graph depicts that 50% of the respondents said that the trade unions were active in undertaking supportive measures to help them during the period of unemployment and only 10% responded that they were inactive in taking respective measures of help.



Figure 34. Response to whether member of union or not

The graph shows that 85% responded that they were members of trade union and 15% doesn't belong to any union.

Satisfaction of union support

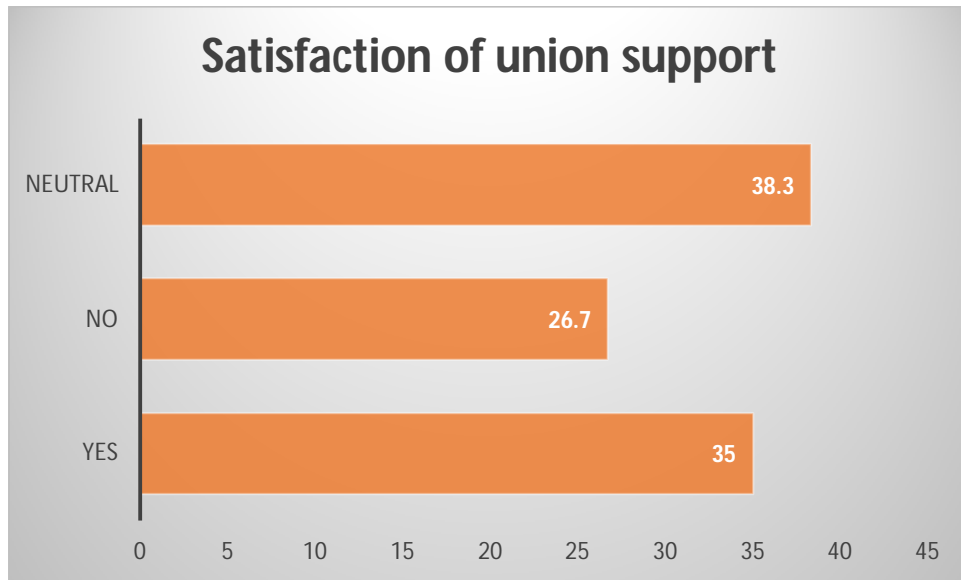


Figure 35. Satisfaction of union support

The graph shows the satisfaction status of respondents with regard to the support of union. It is clear that 35% were satisfied by the support of union and 26.7% weren't satisfied by the union's support. 38.3% doesn't had any opinion.

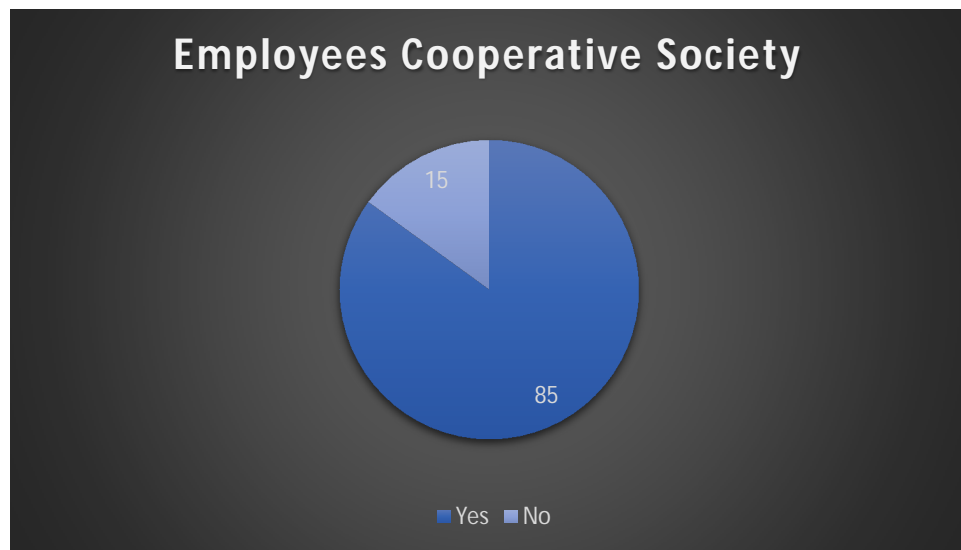


Figure 36. Employee cooperative society

The above chart shows that whether the respondent's industry have any employee cooperative society. 85% responded that their cashew industry have employee cooperative society and the rest responded that their industry haven't had one.

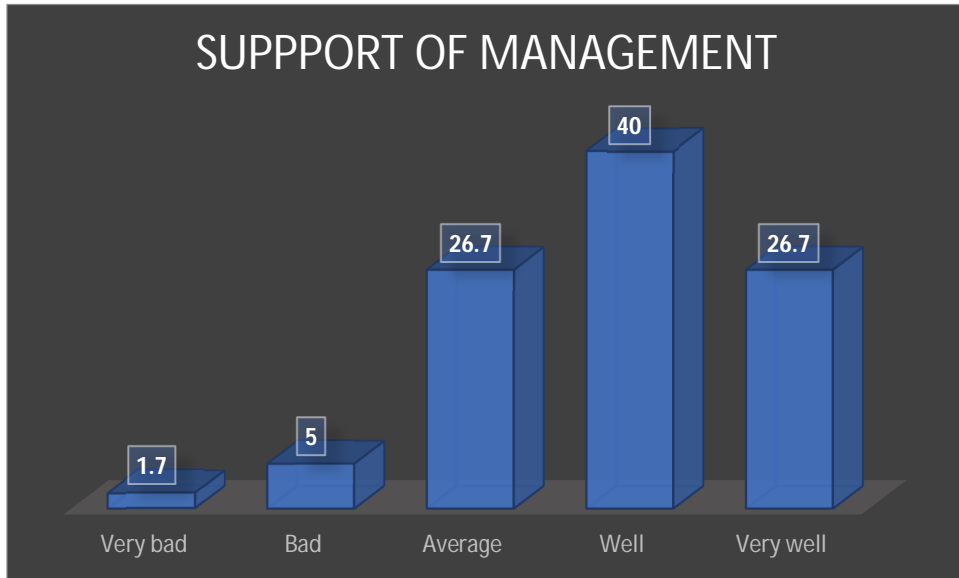


Figure 37. Support of management

The graph denotes the support received by the respondents from the side of management. Majority of them responded that the support from management is well. The least responded that the support was very bad and it is 1.7%.

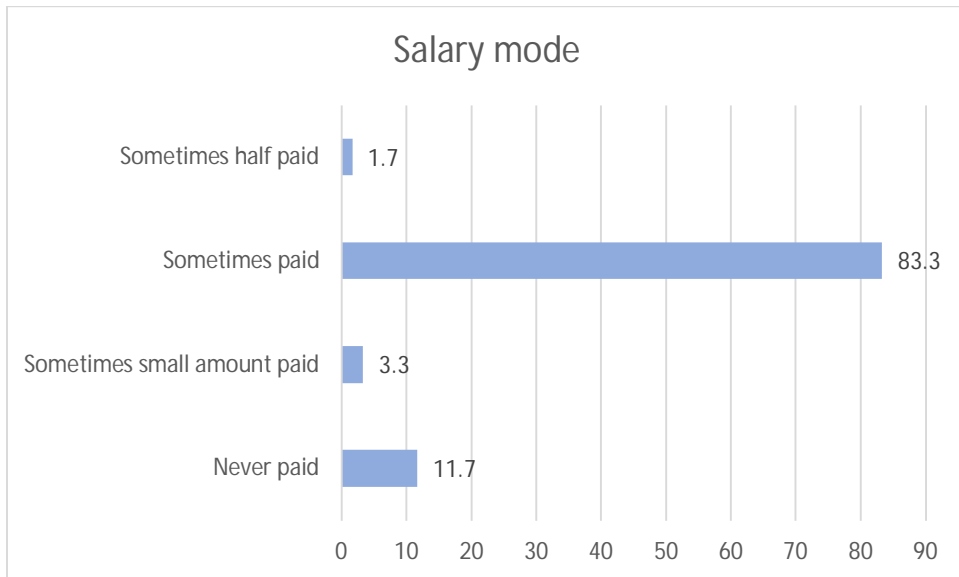


Figure 38. Mode of salary

The graph shows that whether the respondents get their salary in advance. 83.3% responded that they were sometimes paid in advance. 11.7% responded that they weren't paid in advance. The rest of them responded that they were sometimes paid half and sometimes paid small amount.

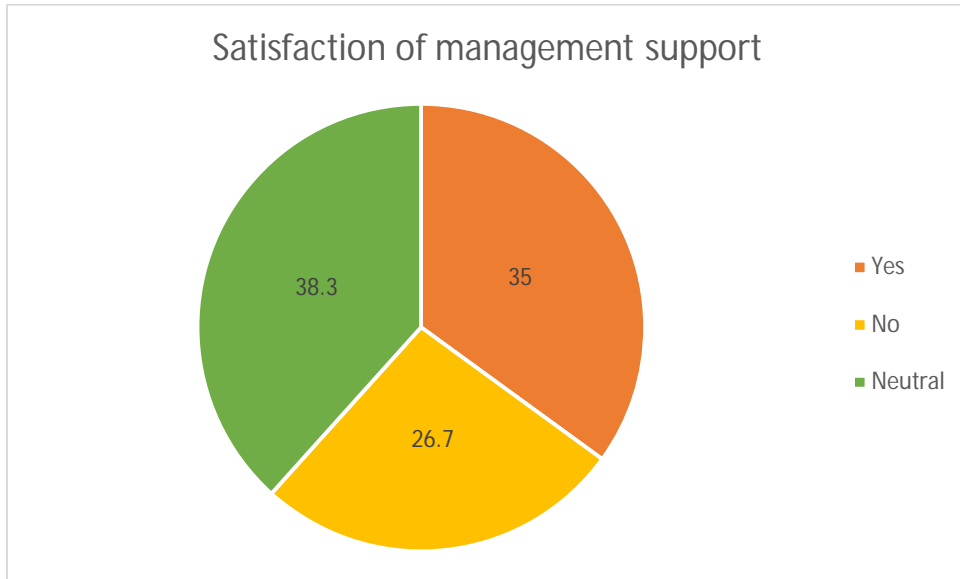


Figure 39. Satisfaction from support of management

The above chart refers to the response of the respondents with regard to the satisfaction of support from management. 38.3% were of a neutral opinion, 35% were satisfied by the support from management.

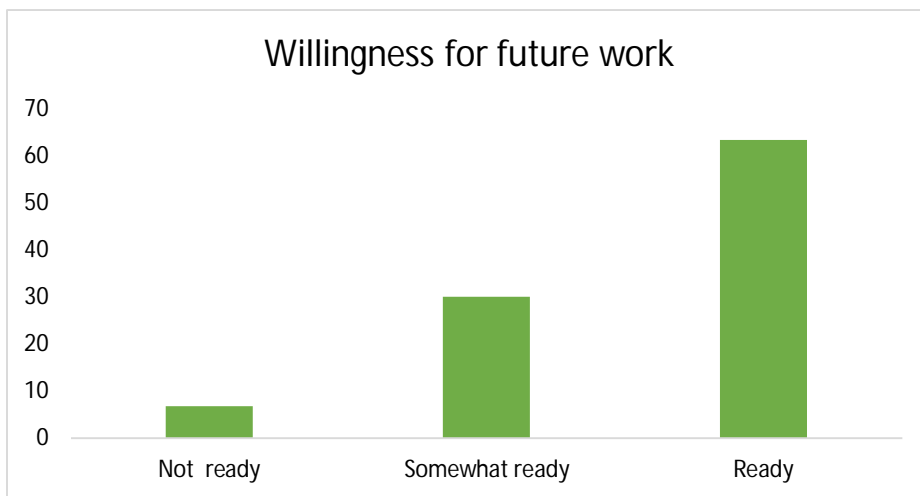


Figure 40. Willingness for future work

The chart depicts the willingness of respondents to work with the management in the future. Majority of them, around 63.3 % were ready to work with them in the future; only 6.7% were not ready to work with them.

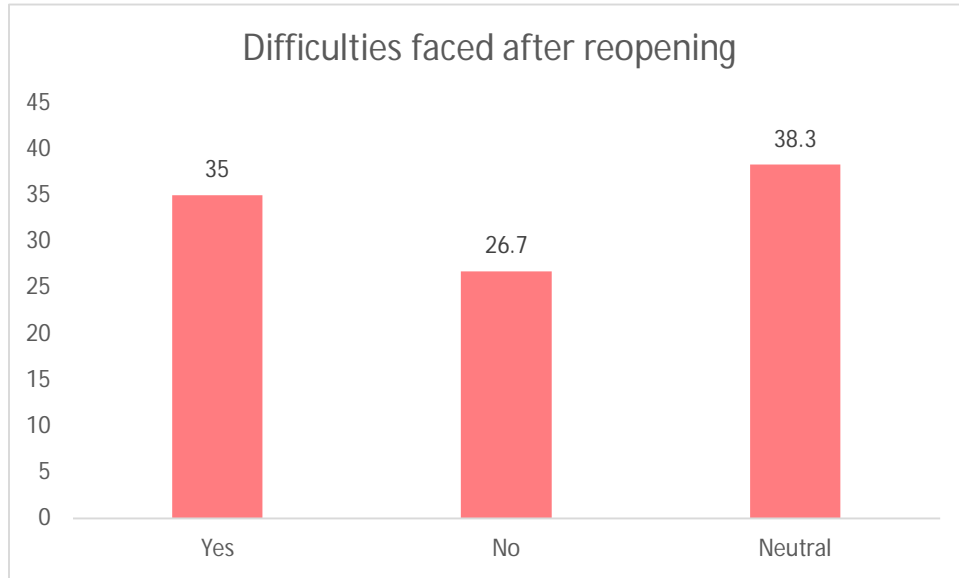


Figure 41. Difficulties faced after reopening

The chart depicts about the difficulties they faced by the reopening of factories after lockdown. 38.3% doesn't have any opinion regarding the difficulties. 35% were of the opinion that they face difficulties after the reopening. 26.7% were of the opinion that they didn't face any difficulties after the reopening.

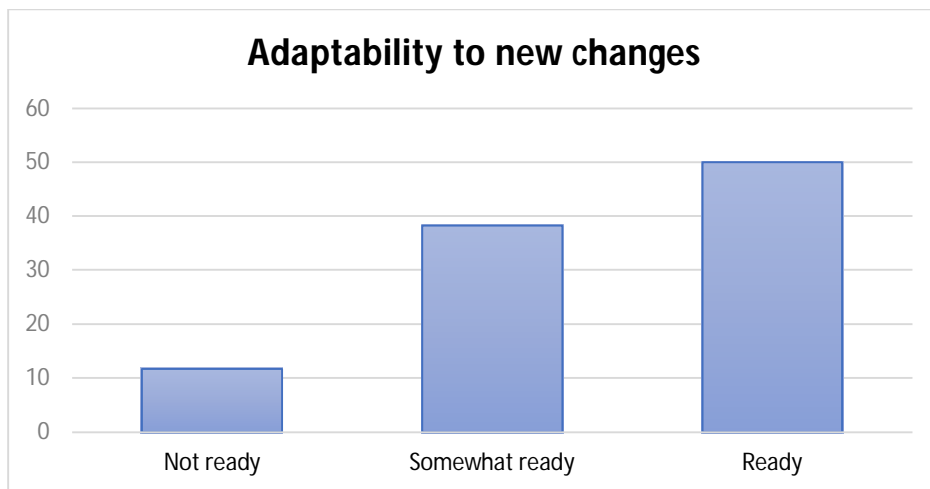


Figure 42. Adaptability to new changes

The graph shows whether the respondents are able to adapt to the new changes. Wearing masks and maintaining social distance were made compulsory during that time, so it seems very difficult for the cashew workers to cope up with the new situation. 50% were ready to adjust to the new changes.

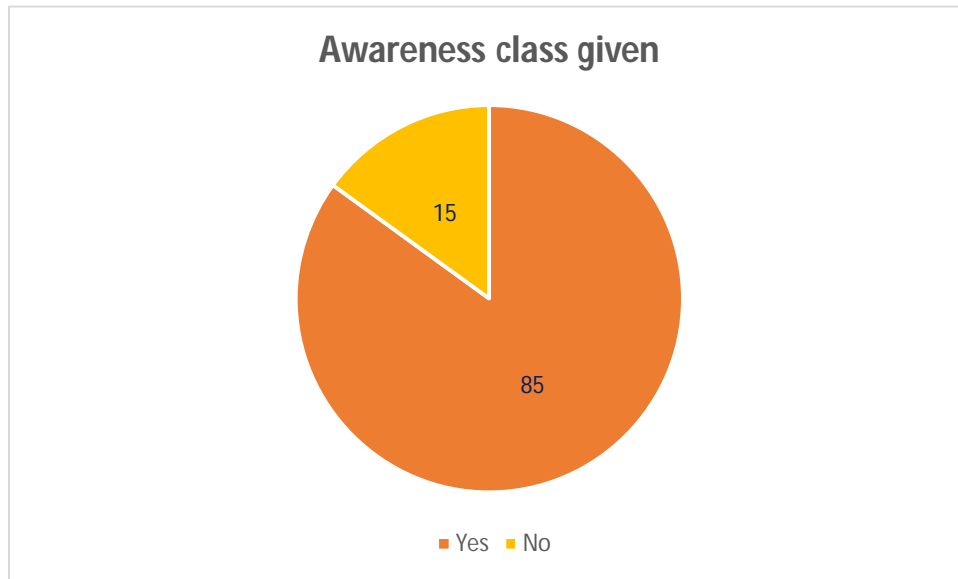


Figure 43. Awareness class given

The graph shows the response of the respondents regarding the awareness class they received with respect to the pandemic period. 85% were responded that they were provided awareness classes before restarting work by the panchayat or health workers. Only the rest 15% responded that they weren't provided any awareness class.

Services at free of cost

The graph shows about the free services provided to the respondents by the management or trade unions. Sanitizers and mask had become an expensive commodity at that time due to huge demand. 26.7% responded that they often received free services.

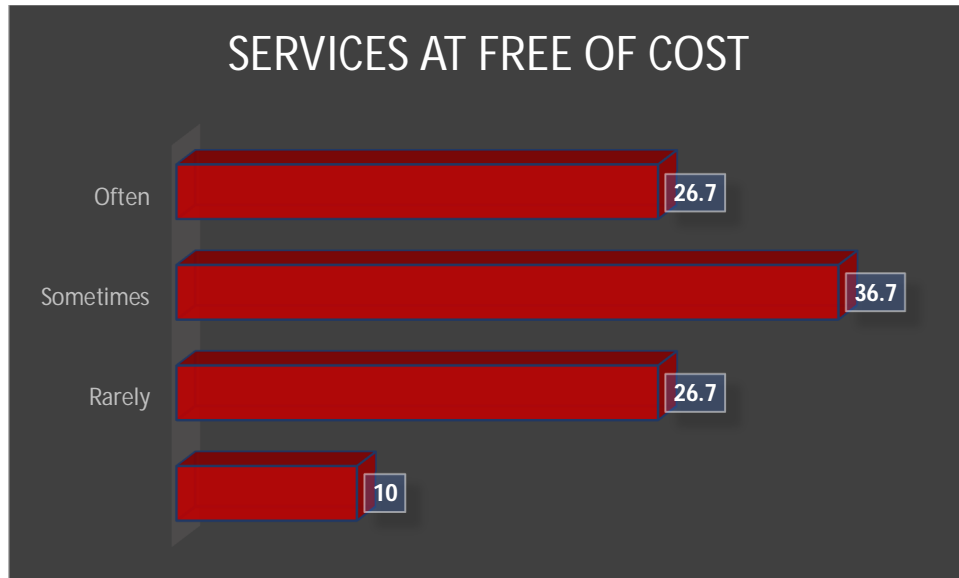


Figure 44. Services at free of cost

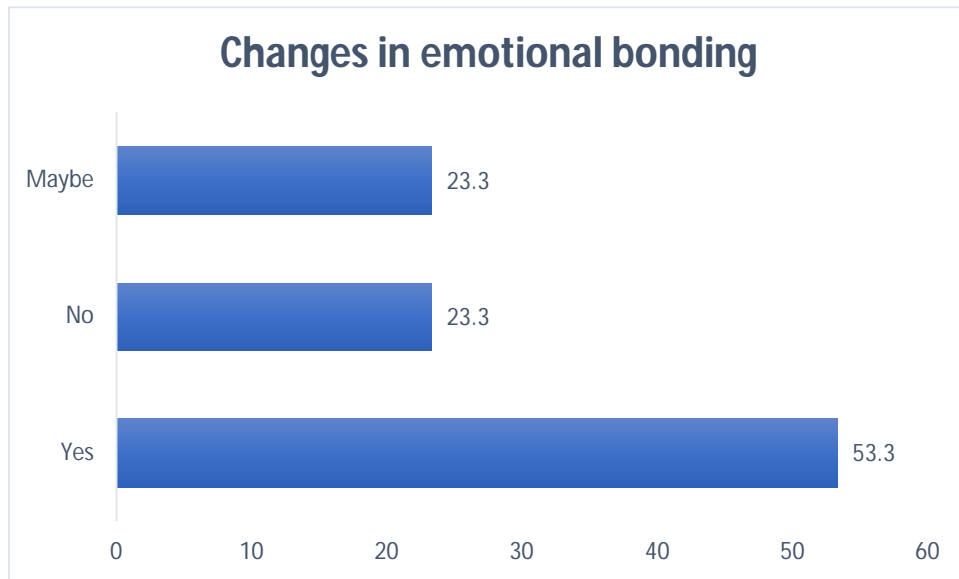


Figure 45. Changes in emotional bonding

The chart depicts about the changes occurred in the emotional bonding of cashew workers. 53.3% responded that there occur a change in their emotional bonding. It shows that working in shifts and social distancing had brought changes in the emotional bonding between workers.

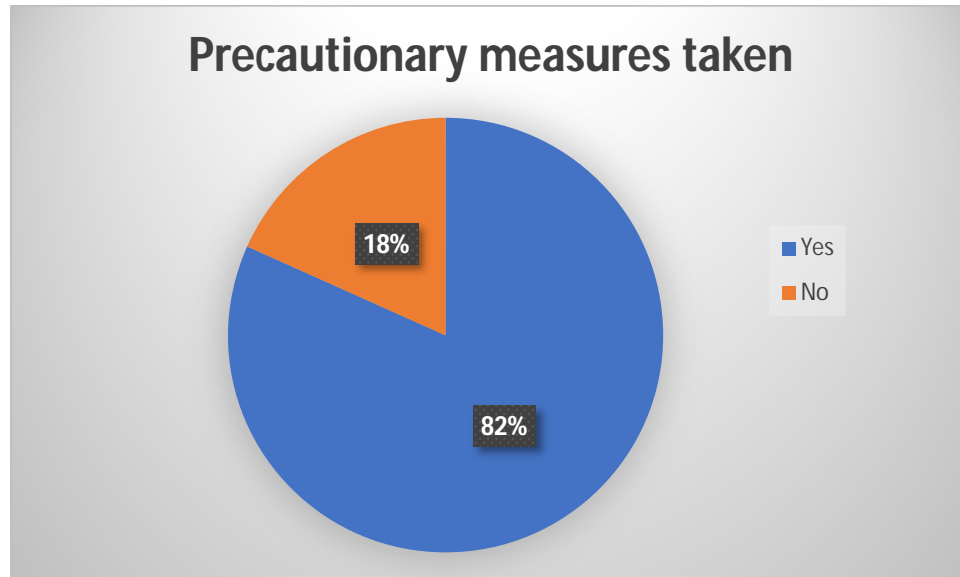


Figure 46. Precautionary measures taken

The chart shows about the response of respondents regarding the precautionary measures taken by the management during the pandemic period. During the corona wave, everybody was afraid of getting affected by this deadly disease. 82% were of the opinion that management have provided precautionary measures.

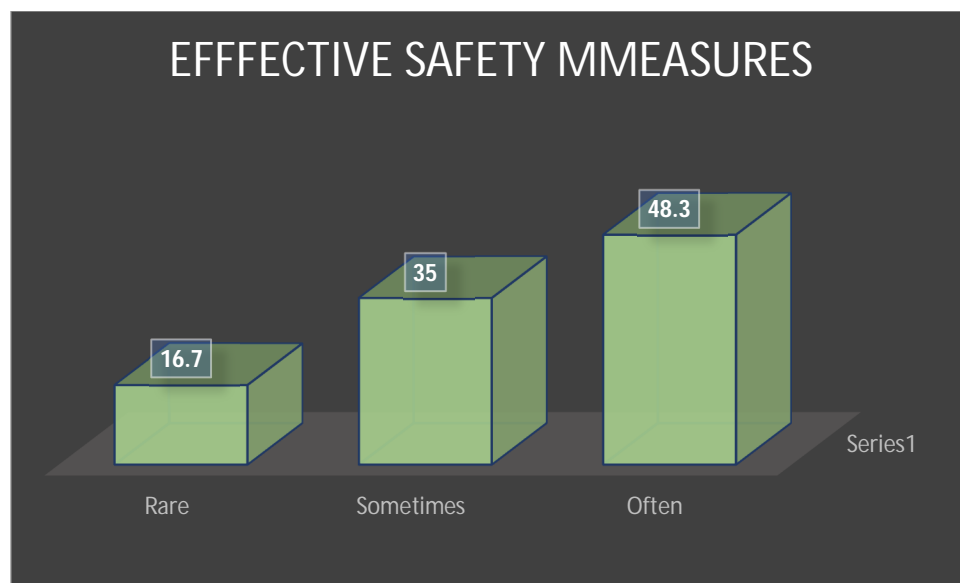


Figure 47. Effective safety measures

The graph shows about the respondent's response regarding with the effectiveness of safety measures provided. Among then 48.3% were responded that this safety measures are often effective.

4.7. CORRELATION BETWEEN BAD HEALTH AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Correlations

		Health problems faced during COVID	Earning hardship
Health problems faced during COVID	Pearson Correlation	1	.328*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	60	60
Earning hardship	Pearson Correlation	.328*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	
	N	60	60

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1. Correlation between bad health and financial hardship

The above table depicts the investigation of correlation between health problems faced during COVID and the earning hardship. Health problems faced is significantly positive correlation with earning hardships of the respondent ($r=0.328$) and it is statistically significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted that financial hardship increases with increase of bad health.

4.8. CORRELATION BETWEEN CHALLENGES FACED AND MANAGEMENT/ TRADE UNION SUPPORT

The below table depicts the investigation of correlation between challenges faced and trade or management support in combating hardships. Challenges faced have a positive correlation with support from management/ trade union ($r = 0.415$) and it is statistically significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

Correlations

		Challenges faced	Management Support
Challenges faced	Pearson Correlation	1	.415**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	60	60
Management Support	Pearson Correlation	.415**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Correlation between challenges faced and management support

4.9. DISCUSSION

Cashew laborers in Kerala commonly denote individuals engaged in the processing of cashew nuts. Kerala stands as a significant state for cashew production in India and boasts a notable sector dedicated to processing cashews. These cashew workers participate in various phases of cashew nut processing, encompassing:

1. Shelling: The extraction of cashew nuts from their hard shells necessitating cracking.
2. Peeling: Removing the inner skin of the cashew kernel, unveiling the creamy-white nut.
3. Grading and Sorting: Categorizing cashew kernels based on their size, colour, and quality.
4. Roasting: Enhancing the flavour and extending the shelf life of cashew kernels through roasting.
5. Packaging: Preparing processed cashew kernels for distribution and sale.

This work can be physically demanding and demand manual finesse. Many of these tasks involve repetitive movements and can prove quite taxing for the labour force.

The present study was about the socio-economic hardships among the cashew workers during the pandemic period.

The present study sought to examine the socio-economic hardships faced by women cashew workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of socio-demographic aspects revealed several key findings that shed light on the unique challenges faced by this population.

4.9.1. Socio-Demographic Aspects:

The majority of respondents fell within the age group of 51 to 60 years, highlighting the prevalence of middle-aged women in the cashew industry. This distribution might be attributed to the industry's historical employment patterns or the changing dynamics of the workforce over time.

Regarding marital status, a significant portion of respondents were married, which is consistent with the socio-cultural norms prevalent in the region. Interestingly, a notable number were widowed or separated, possibly indicating the influence of family dynamics and individual life circumstances on their engagement in the cashew sector.

The education level of respondents revealed a trend towards lower levels of formal education, with the majority having received Lower Primary education. This could be indicative of limited access to educational opportunities, potentially impacting their economic mobility and bargaining power.

Family structures among respondents varied, with a majority having nuclear families. This suggests that the nuclear family setup is more common among women cashew workers in the study area. The diversity in family structures could influence their access to social support and resources during times of hardship.

4.9.2. Challenges Due to Family Responsibilities:

A significant proportion of respondents identified themselves as the main income generators of their families, underlining their pivotal role in household financial stability. However, a substantial percentage expressed dissatisfaction with their income, echoing broader issues of wage disparity and financial vulnerability in the industry.

Despite their pivotal economic contributions, a mere 13.3% of respondents reported having sufficient time to spend with their families after work. This highlights the challenge of work-life balance, which is often exacerbated in industries characterized by irregular working hours and demanding tasks.

Discrimination faced by respondents from relatives due to their occupation as cashew workers was reported by a small percentage of respondents. This points towards societal attitudes and perceptions that might contribute to additional emotional and psychological stress.

Moreover, the majority of respondents indicated their inability to participate in family functions or celebrations due to work commitments, which could lead to a sense of isolation and detachment from their families and communities.

4.9.3. Impact of COVID-19 and Loss of Employment:

The impact of COVID-19 on the cashew industry was palpable, with a significant decrease in work reported by the majority of respondents. This decrease underscores the vulnerability of informal labour markets to external shocks, such as pandemics and economic downturns.

Loss of work during the pandemic was a widespread issue, with 90% of respondents experiencing this challenge. This substantial figure highlights the precariousness of their employment, underscoring the need for interventions to provide social and economic safety nets for workers in such industries.

Difficulties in accessing vaccines during the initial stages of the pandemic were reported by a majority of respondents. This indicates potential barriers to healthcare access, emphasizing the intersection of health and socio-economic challenges faced by these workers.

4.9.4. Role of Trade Union and Management:

The role of trade unions and management in addressing the challenges faced by cashew workers during the pandemic was noteworthy. The majority of respondents acknowledged the active presence of trade unions in their workplaces, with a significant percentage being union members. The support provided by trade unions played a crucial role in mitigating the impact of unemployment, providing a safety net for many workers.

Management's response during the pandemic was generally positive, with a majority of respondents expressing satisfaction with the precautionary measures and support provided. This reflects the importance of responsive management in ensuring the well-being of workers during times of crisis.

4.9.5. Relationship Between Health and Financial Hardship:

An important finding emerged from the analysis, revealing a positive relationship between financial hardship and the deterioration of health. This highlights the interconnectedness of socio-

economic challenges and health outcomes, suggesting that addressing financial vulnerabilities might have positive implications for overall well-being.

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the socio-economic hardships faced by women cashew workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions, including improved work conditions, access to social safety nets, and gender-sensitive policies that address the specific challenges faced by this vulnerable population.

4.9.6. Tenability of hypothesis

SL NO	HYPOTHESIS	TENABILITY
1	Financial hardship will increase with the increase in bad condition of health.	Accepted
2	There is a positive influence of trade unions and management in facing the challenges during pandemic.	Accepted

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The present chapter includes the findings, suggestions and conclusion. The findings and suggestions are based on the specific objective of the study. The specific objectives include socio-demographic aspects, challenges faced by cashew workers due to family responsibilities, impact of loss of employment due to lockdown, difficulties faced due to pandemic, role of trade unions and management, relationship between health and financial hardship during pandemic.

5.2. MAJOR FINDINGS

Socio-demographic aspects

The data reveal that majority of the cashew workers are of the age group 51 to 60. Majority of them are from nuclear family, with four members. The year of experience for most of them is 10 years and below. The other data was that only minority of them are not the main income generator of their family. The earning members of the most of the cashew workers is 2. Challenges faced by cashew workers due to family responsibilities Majority of the cashew workers are the main income generator of their family. They have multiple roles and responsibilities to do. With this the remuneration provided for them is not increasing and most of them is not satisfied with the incentive received. Majority of them have no sufficient time to spend with the family. Compared with the other studies, cashew workers are not discriminated by the family.

Difficulties faced by cashew worker due to COVID-19

The present study shown that there are difficulties faced by the cashew workers. Most of the concern is regarding the decrease in the work when compared to the pre-COVID-19. Majority of them were not satisfied with the work shifting and the remuneration were not given properly during the lockdown. Majority of them faced loss of work due to the pandemic. During the initial stage of pandemic, they faced difficulty in getting vaccine. Majority lives near the factory, so transportation difficulty is comparatively low.

Role of trade union and management in combating these challenges

The present study shows that trade unions were active in majority of the factories. They take proper supportive measure during the unemployment period. Majority of the cashew workers are active members of union. Most of them are satisfied with the support of both union and management. Salaries were sometimes provided in advance. They were ready to work with them in the future also. They were provided with free services and safety measures.

Impact of loss of employment due to lockdown

During lockdown most of them were the only income generator of the family. Half of them doesn't possess any savings. They face different kind of exploitation like under payment, poor working conditions. They don't have any loans, they received credits and money borrow for meeting the expense.

Relation between health and financial hardship

The investigation of correlation between health and financial hardship of the respondents shows that financial hardship is significantly positive correlation with bad health of the respondent ($r = 0.328$) and it is statistically significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted that is the financial hardship increases with increase in bad health.

Relation between hardship faced and the support from management

The investigation of correlation between hardship faced by the respondent and support from management shows that there is a positive influence of trade unions and management in facing the hardships faced by respondent during the pandemic period. There is a positive correlation ($r = 0.415$) and it is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted.

5.3. SUGGESTIONS

To support the weaker sections of women cashew workers, the government should introduce policies and programs that address their unique needs and challenges. A permanent wage system should be established to ensure that cashew workers are paid fairly. Additionally, the government should take steps to revitalize the cashew industry and improve the socio-economic conditions of

women cashew workers. Women's empowerment programs should be strengthened, particularly in the private sector, to ensure that women have equal opportunities to succeed in the industry. The establishment and strengthening of community support networks and association for women cashew workers should be encouraged, these will serve as platforms for sharing information, resources and mutual assistance. The health sector can also be modified in response to the present condition; so that we can avoid the rush in receiving treatment during the pandemic. Computer literacy and common awareness can be provided to the needful ones. The management can provide alternative employment or skill training within the processing units. Further research should be promoted to explore the evolving challenges and opportunities for women cashew workers beyond the immediate context of the pandemic. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the effectiveness of implemented interventions.

5.4. CONCLUSION

The present study dealt with the socio-economic hardships among the cashew workers. The findings reveal that these women face various challenges such as low wages, work loss, and difficulty in finding alternative sources of income. The limited access to bank loans or chitty make their condition worsen. The pandemic has also affected the workers ability to provide online assistance to their children, which has further exacerbated their socio-economic hardships.

To address these issues, it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders implement policies and programs that promote fair wages, better working conditions, and more opportunities for women in the industry. Unions should be strengthened and encouraged to support women cashew workers, while financial institutions should make it easier for them to access loans and other financial resources. By taking these steps, we can help improve the socio-economic conditions of women cashew workers and promote gender equality in the industry.

REFERENCES

- Aware, K. S., Zambre, N. B., Patil, P. S., & Khaire, V. S. (2021). Design and development of female-friendly cashew nut deshelling machine. *Materials Today: Proceedings*, 46(2), 1805-1810.
- Beevi, M. A. A. (1976). Kerala's minimum wage law: Some experiences. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 19(4), 443-452.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson.
- Deepa, P. (1994). Empowerment of women through trade unions - A case study of cashew processing factories in Kerala. *Journal of Rural Development*, 13(4), 505-522.
- Elifson, K. W. (1998). *Fundamentals of Social Statistics*. McGraw Hill.
- Farah, M. J., Shera, D. M., Savage, J. H., Betancourt, L., Giannetta, J. M., Brodsky, N. L., ... & Hurt, H. (2006). Childhood poverty: Specific associations with neurocognitive development. *Brain Research*, 1110(1), 166-174.
- Government of India. (1982). Working and living conditions of cashew nut processing workers in Kerala. *Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India*.
- Government of Travancore-Cochin. (1953). Committee on wages and other conditions of work in cashew industry. *Government Press*.
- Grover, D. S. (1988). Women in the cashew industry: An occupational health perspective. *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, 49(1), 41-48.
- James, K. S. (1981). Problems of Kerala cashew industry workers. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16(51), M120-M128.
- John, M. (1990). Problems of cashew workers in Kanyakumari district. *Man in India*, 70(4), 373-384.
- Kannan, K. P. (1978). Child labour in cashew nut processing industry. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 21(4), 473-482.
- Kinslin, D., & Kumar, V. M. (2019). Occupational hazards of cashew workers in India. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 6(5), 1835-1840.

Lindberg, A. (2001). Women, trade unions, and cashew factories in Kerala, India. *World Development*, 29(7), 1235-1253.

Lindberg, A., & Anna, S. (2005). Empowerment of women through trade unions - A case study of cashew processing factories in Kerala. *Man in India*, 85(3-4), 315-330.

Madhura, H. S., Raghavendra, S. V., & Ramakrishna, S. (2020). Socioeconomic conditions of women cashew workers in Indian cashew industry: A survey. *Materials Today: Proceedings*, 26(5), 2914-2918.

Nguyen, H., Pham, T., & Nguyen, P. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on the Livelihood of Cashew Nut Processing Workers in Binh Phuoc, Vietnam. *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development*, 10(4), 189-198.

Parvathy, K. U. (2018). A study on the causes and consequences of the decline of cashew industry in Kollam district. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences*, 3(1), 1-6.

Patel, M., & Das, S. (2020). Gendered Impact of COVID-19: Analysis of Labour Market Outcomes of Female Workers in India. *IZA Discussion Paper*, No. 13510.

Priyanka, A. (2021). Study on impact of COVID-19 on women employees. *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering*, 9(2), 4336-4338.

Rajan, A. R. T., & Binilkumar, K. (2004). SWOT analysis of the cashew industry in Kerala. *The Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 59(3), 375-387.

Rajanbabu, C. V. (1999). Problems and prospects of the cashew industry in India. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 54(3), 361-366.

Retheesh, T. P. (2005). A study on the socio-economic situation of cashew workers: An analysis of reasons for migration of industry to neighbouring states. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 48(3), 691-704.

Sharma, R., & Verma, M. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on Women Workers in Rural India. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 64(1), 151-164.

Smith, K., O'Driscoll, M., Giandhari, J., & Perlman-Orr, S. (2020). COVID-19: Vulnerability and the power of privilege in a pandemic. *Health Policy and Planning*, 35(6), 812-816.

Stevelal, M. S. (2018). Socio-economic importance of women workers in cashew industry of Kerala. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 7(3), 223- 225.

Sudha, P. S. (1997). Occupational health problems of women workers in cashew industry. *Indian Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 43(2), 75-79.

Umaprabha, S. M. (2022). Digital financial skills of per-product paid cashew workers and their financial inclusion: A study. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 11(1), 1-14.

APPENDIX
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**UNVEILING SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS FACED BY WOMEN
CASHEW WORKERS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1

To study the socio-demographic profile of the cashew workers

1. Name
2. Age
3. Marital status
 - Single
 - Married
 - Widowed
 - Divorced
 - Separated
4. Educational status
 - Lower primary
 - Upper primary
 - High school
 - Higher secondary
5. Living location
 - Rural
 - Semi-urban
6. Type of household

Nuclear

Extended

Joint

7. No: of family members
8. No: of earning members in family
9. Total annual income of the family
10. Years of job experience

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2

To understand the challenges faced by cashew workers due to family responsibilities

1. Are you the primary bread winner of the family?

Yes

No

Sometimes

2. Whether you are satisfied with the income.

Yes

No

3. Do you get enough time to spend with the family?

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Almost

Never

4. Being a cashew worker, do you face any discrimination among your relatives?

Very rare

Rare

Sometimes

Often

Very often

5. Due to your work, you were not able to participate in the programmes that take place in your family.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly disagree

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3

To understand the difficulties faced by cashew workers during COVID-19

1. Was there any decrease in work when compared to pre- Covid period?

Yes

No

2. What were the additional conditions in the industry during COVID pandemic?

3. During lockdown, do you get your remuneration properly?

Yes

No

4. How many hours do you usually work?

5 hours

6 hours

7 hours

8 hours

9 hours

5. Is there any case of loss of work due to pandemic?

Yes

No

6. Is the working hour reduced during the pandemic period?

Often

Frequently

Sometimes

Never

7. Whether there is any case of work shift during the pandemic?

Yes

No

8. Did you encounter any traffic difficulties during pandemic period?

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

9. Did you face any health problems during the pandemic?

Yes

No

10. How does it affect your health?

Headache and Fever

Body pain

Tiredness

Other

11. Does your health condition badly affect your earning?

Yes

No

12. During the initial stage, do you face any difficulty in getting vaccine due to its high price?

Yes

No

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 4

To study the impact of loss of employment due to lockdown

1. During lockdown most of the factories were non-operative for a longer period. Did you have any alternative source of income?

Yes

No

2. Was there any other earning member in family during lockdown?

Yes

No

3. Since the economy was badly struck by the corona wave, was it difficult to find any other income source?

Often

Sometimes

Rare

Never

4. When I talked with cashew worker's I came to know that normally you received salary weekly; most of them are used to settle the debts in provision stores and meet other expenses with that. In that case how did you managed to deal with such expenses during the period of unemployment?

Received credit

Money borrowing

Other

5. Did you have any bank loans or chitty?

Yes

No

6. From where the loans or chitty is availed?
7. Since there was a huge shortage of unskilled jobs, did you face any sort of exploitation?

Under payment

Extra working hour

Poor working conditions

Others

8. Did you have any savings in your bank account?

Yes

No

9. Was this saving helpful during the pandemic period?

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 5

To identify the role of trade union and management in combating the challenges during pandemic

1. Is trade union active in your factory?

Yes

No

2. Were they active in undertaking supportive measures to help you during the period of unemployment?

Often

Sometimes

Never

3. Is you member of any union?

Yes

No

4. What were the activities they have undertaken to support you?

5. Are you satisfied with their support?

Yes

No

Sometimes

6. Did your factory have any employee cooperative society?

Yes

No

7. What about the support from your management?

Well

Very well

Average

Bad

Very bad

8. Did they give you any salary in advance?

Sometimes paid

Sometimes half paid

Sometimes small amount paid

Never paid

9. What were the steps taken by them to support you?

10. Are you happy with management's support during lockdown?

Yes

No

Maybe

11. Are you willing to work with them in the future also?

Ready

Somewhat ready

Not ready

12. When the factory reopened after lockdown, did you find any difficulties?

Yes

No

Neutral

13. Wearing mask and maintaining social distance were made compulsory during that time. Were you able to adapt with these new changes?

Ready

Somewhat ready

Not ready

14. Did the panchayat / health workers provide any awareness classes to you before restarting work?

Yes

No

15. Sanitizers and masks have become an expensive commodity at that time due to huge demand. Did the management or trade unions have provided them to you at free of cost?

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

16. Do you think working in shifts and social distancing had brought about any changes in the emotional bonding between workers?

Yes

No

Maybe

17. During the corona wave everybody were afraid of getting affected by this corona wave. Were there any precautionary measures taken by the management?

Yes

No

18. Do you find the safety measures provided effective?

Often

Sometimes
