

**SURVIVING PRECARIOUS: A STUDY ON WAGE THEFT AND
ALIENATION AMONG MIGRANT LABOURERS IN THE
UNORGANIZED SECTOR**

MSW DISASTER MANAGEMENT

2024 - 2026

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Course Code SWDM 547

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER - I	6 - 11
INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 INTRODUCTION	7
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	8
1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	9
1.4 RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY	10
1.5 CHAPTERIZATION	11
CHAPTER - II	12 - 21
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 INTRODUCTION	13
2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	19
2.5 RESEARCH GAP ANALYSIS	20
CHAPTER - III	21-29
METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 INTRODUCTION	22
3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY	22
3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	22
3.4 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS	23
3.5 PILOT STUDY	25
3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN	25
3.7 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS	25
3.8 SAMPLING STRATEGY	26
3.9 DATA COLLECTION	27
3.10 DATA ANALYSIS	27
3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	28
3.12 ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE.....	29
CHAPTER - IV	31- 34
CASE DESCRIPTIONS	31
4.1 INTRODUCTION	32
4.2 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS.....	32
4.3 CASE DESCRIPTIONS.....	33
CHAPTER - V	61-63
THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	61

5.1 INTRODUCTION	62
5.2 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	62
CHAPTER -VI.....	67- 76
FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION	67
6.1 INTRODUCTION	68
6.2 FINDINGS	68
6.2 SUGGESTIONS.....	70
6.3 CONCLUSION	71
REFERENCES	72
ANNEXURES.....	75
INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	75

ABSTRACT

Migrant labourers are an important part of India's workforce and contribute greatly to the country's economy, especially in the unorganized sector. However, they often work in difficult and insecure conditions with low wages, long working hours, and little legal protection. One of the major problems they face is wage theft, in which workers are not paid in full, paid late, or denied wages they have earned. Such experiences not only create financial hardship but also affect their dignity, self-worth, and relationship with their work, leading to a feeling of alienation. Although migrant labourers play a vital role in society, their everyday experiences of wage theft and alienation have not received enough attention.

This study aims to understand the experiences of migrant labourers who face wage theft and to examine how these experiences lead to feelings of alienation. The study also explores the ways workers cope with these challenges in their daily lives. A qualitative research design was used to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. The study was conducted among migrant labourers working in the unorganized sector in Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with migrant workers engaged in occupations such as construction work, gardening, and domestic work, and were analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings show that wage theft occurs in various forms, including delayed wages, underpayment, unpaid overtime, and unfair deductions. These problems increase financial insecurity and create feelings of frustration, helplessness, and separation from their work and society. The study also found that a lack of awareness of labour rights, dependence on contractors, language barriers, and weak implementation of labour laws make migrant workers more vulnerable to exploitation. Despite these challenges, many workers continue to survive by supporting one another, adapting to difficult situations, and remaining hopeful for a better future.

The study highlights the need for stronger enforcement of labour laws, timely wage payments, stronger legal protections, and improved access to welfare schemes for migrant labourers. It also emphasizes the important role of social workers, policymakers, and labour authorities in protecting workers' rights and improving their quality of life. By focusing on the lived experiences of migrant labourers, this study contributes to a better understanding of wage theft and alienation in the unorganized sector and calls for greater efforts to ensure dignity, justice, and decent work for all.

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Migrant labourers in the unorganized sector often live a life centred on survival, where each day depends on finding work, earning a small income, and managing food, rent, and family needs. Because their jobs are temporary and without legal protection, their lives become marked by precarity, which means constant uncertainty, low wages, and no security (Standing, 2011; Srivastava, 2020). This precarity creates conditions in which employers and contractors can easily exploit workers, leading to wage theft, including failing to pay workers in full, delaying payments, or making unfair deductions (Choudhary, 2021; Sinha, 2018).

When wages are stolen or delayed, migrant workers struggle even more to survive, fall into debt, and lose trust in the work system they depend on. Over time, these experiences also lead to alienation, in which workers feel disconnected from their labour, powerless in decision-making, and treated merely as tools rather than as human beings with dignity (Marx, 1844; Breman, 2013). Thus, survival struggles, precarity, wage theft, and alienation are not separate problems but are strongly linked; each one deepens the others and shapes the daily reality of migrant labourers in the unorganised sector.

Migrant labourers play a significant role in sectors such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality, transportation, and domestic work, contributing substantially to economic growth despite remaining largely invisible in labour policies and social protection systems. Internal migration is often driven by poverty, unemployment, agrarian distress, environmental changes, and limited livelihood opportunities in rural areas. However, upon reaching urban centres, migrant workers frequently encounter poor working conditions, overcrowded housing, occupational hazards, inadequate access to healthcare, and exclusion from welfare schemes due to the absence of identity documents or the lack of portability of social security benefits (ILO, 2021; Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). These structural inequalities reinforce their vulnerability and limit their ability to secure stable livelihoods and decent working conditions.

Understanding the interconnected experiences of survival struggles, precarity, wage theft, and alienation is essential for developing effective labour policies and social work interventions. While several studies have examined migrant labour in relation to employment insecurity and labour rights, fewer have explored how these dimensions interact to shape workers' everyday lives and well-being.

This study aims to understand how survival struggles, job insecurity, wage theft, and alienation are connected in the lives of migrant labourers in the unorganized sector. It also seeks to contribute to existing knowledge on migrant workers and to emphasize the need for stronger legal protections, timely grievance redressal, improved social security, and policies that protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of migrant labourers.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Migrant labourers constitute a significant share of India's unorganized workforce and contribute substantially to urban and industrial economies. Despite their economic importance, they continue to face severe socio-economic, legal, and psychological challenges. Employment in the unorganized sector is largely informal, insecure, and poorly regulated, leaving migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation and instability. Job insecurity, low wages, absence of written contracts, and dependence on daily or short-term employment make it difficult for them to maintain a stable livelihood or plan for the future (ILO, 2022; NCEUS, 2007).

Although several labour laws and welfare schemes exist to protect workers' rights, their implementation in the unorganized sector remains limited. Migrant labourers often lack access to legal aid, identity documents, and institutional support, making it difficult to claim minimum wages, social security, or welfare benefits. Institutional failures, including inadequate monitoring and slow response mechanisms, leave migrant workers largely unprotected, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2022; Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2021).

Alongside economic and legal hardships, migrant labourers experience significant psychological stress. Financial insecurity, social isolation, separation from family, and emotional distress contribute to anxiety, depression, and poor mental wellbeing. While workers adopt coping strategies such as relying on social networks, informal borrowing, frequent job changes, and emotional resilience, these mechanisms only help them survive day-to-day hardships and do not address the structural causes of exploitation (Bhagat et al., 2020; Srivastava, 2020).

This study differs from existing research by using a qualitative, lived-experience-based approach that focuses on the voices of migrant labourers in the unorganized sector. While many earlier studies rely on surveys and secondary data, this research explores how migrant workers

experience, understand, and respond to problems such as wage theft, job insecurity, and lack of legal protection in their daily lives.

The study captures individual narratives through in-depth interviews, showing that migrant workers are not a single uniform group but have diverse experiences. It integrates economic, legal, and psychological dimensions to understand how these issues are interconnected and affect workers' wellbeing and family life. Unlike policy-focused studies, this research highlights coping and survival strategies developed by migrant workers, emphasizing their resilience and agency. By linking workers' lived realities with existing labour policies, the study offers a ground-level, practice-oriented understanding of migrant labour vulnerability in the unorganized sector.

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Migration for work is common in India, especially among people from poor and rural backgrounds. Many workers move from their home states to cities and towns in search of employment. Most migrant labourers find work in the unorganized sector, such as construction, factories, hotels, street vending, domestic work, and daily wage labour. These jobs usually do not provide job security, fixed wages, or social protection. (Bhagat et al., 2020).

Migrant labourers play an important role in the economy, but their working and living conditions are often difficult. They are usually employed without written contracts and depend on daily or short-term work. Because of this, they face problems like low wages, job insecurity, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and wage theft. Many workers do not receive their full wages on time, and some are not paid at all for overtime or extra work (ILO, 2022).

Although labour laws and welfare schemes exist to protect workers, many migrant labourers are unable to access these benefits. Lack of awareness, language barriers, frequent movement, and weak law enforcement prevent them from claiming their rights. As a result, there is a big gap between legal protection and the actual experiences of migrant workers (Bhagat et al., 2020).

Apart from economic problems, migrant labourers also face social and psychological difficulties. Living away from their families, poor housing conditions, financial stress, and

social isolation affect their mental health. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and insecurity are common among migrant workers (Srivastava, 2020).

In this context, it is important to understand the real-life experiences of migrant labourers in the unorganized sector. Studying their daily struggles, coping strategies, and challenges can help identify gaps in policy implementation and improve social work interventions and labour welfare measures.

1.4 RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study is important because migrant labourers are a major part of the unorganized workforce, yet their problems are often ignored. By focusing on their real-life experiences, the study helps to understand the everyday difficulties they face, such as wage theft, job insecurity, lack of legal protection, poor living conditions, and mental stress. The findings of this study are useful for social workers, NGOs, and policymakers as they highlight the gaps between labour laws and actual working conditions. The study can help in designing better awareness programmes, legal support, and welfare services for migrant workers. It also gives migrant labourers a voice by documenting their lived experiences, thereby supporting more inclusive and worker-friendly policies and interventions (Bhagat & Govil, 2020).

Furthermore, the study contributes to the field of social work by providing evidence that can support rights-based advocacy, community organization, and policy reforms aimed at improving the well-being of migrant labourers. It enhances understanding of the socio-economic and psychosocial challenges faced by migrant workers and can assist researchers, government agencies, and civil society organizations in developing effective interventions and social protection measures. The findings may also serve as a valuable resource for future research on labour migration, informal employment, and workers' rights, while contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to decent work, reduced inequalities, and social justice (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

1.5 CHAPTERIZATION

The Chapterization of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Review of literature

Chapter III: Methodology

Chapter IV: Case Description

Chapter V: Thematic Analysis and Discussion

Chapter VI: Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

References and Annexures will be appended in the following Chapter

CHAPTER - II
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review is the process of reviewing, summarising, and critically evaluating existing research on a particular topic. It is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates over time and that researchers build on the work of previous scholars (Neuman, 2014).

A literature review is a systematic look at existing research, articles, books, and reports on a topic. It helps a researcher understand what's already known, spot gaps in that knowledge, and build a theoretical base for their own study. It also shapes the research objectives, guides the choice of methods, and helps in interpreting results. By comparing how different scholars have tackled similar issues, researchers can better position their own work within the broader body of knowledge.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Migrant labourers in the unorganized sector face many challenges that affect their daily lives and overall wellbeing. The literature shows that they face several socioeconomic problems, including job insecurity, low and unstable wages, and unfair treatment in the workplace. Another important theme is the legal and institutional failures that leave migrant workers unprotected, as many labour laws, rights, and welfare schemes do not effectively reach them.

Along with economic and legal issues, migrant workers also deal with significant psychological problems. Stress, loneliness, emotional strain, and mental health difficulties often arise from their living and working conditions. Despite these hardships, migrant labourers develop various coping strategies and survival mechanisms, such as relying on social networks, changing jobs, borrowing money, and finding emotional strength to continue. These themes form the foundation of the review, helping to understand the complex experiences of migrant labourers in the unorganized sector.

Socio-Economic difficulties faced by Migrant labourers

Migrant labourers in the unorganized sector face many socio-economic difficulties mainly because their work is unstable, low-paid, and not protected by law. One major problem is job insecurity. Migrant workers often depend on short-term or daily-wage jobs, which means they can lose their work at any time without warning. This uncertainty makes it difficult for them to plan their income, support their families, or build a stable life (Srivastava, 2020).

Linked to this is the serious issue of wage theft, in which workers do not receive the full wages they earned. Wage theft includes late payments, partial payments, unpaid overtime, and unfair deductions. Because migrant workers urgently need money to survive, they cannot always fight against such exploitation, and many accept whatever they receive (Choudhary, 2021). This directly harms their livelihood and wellbeing. When wages are stolen or delayed, migrant workers struggle to pay for food, rent, travel, and family needs. It pushes them into debt and increases stress, anxiety, and overall hardship (Sinha, 2018).

These problems are often made worse by employer practices and labour exploitation. Many employers prefer migrant workers because they can be made to work long hours, paid low wages, and replaced easily. Without legal contracts, workers have little power to question unfair treatment. Contractors and middlemen sometimes control access to jobs, collect commissions, and make workers dependent on them (Bremar, 2013).

Finally, migrant labourers experience social exclusion and a lack of voice. They often live in temporary settlements, far away from community networks and support systems. They may not know the local language, laws, or welfare schemes, making it harder to speak up for their rights. Their social invisibility means their problems go unnoticed, and they rarely have a chance to participate in decision-making at worksites or in local communities (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Together, these socio-economic problems create a cycle of vulnerability where migrant workers continue to face insecurity, exploitation, and limited opportunities to improve their lives.

Legal and Institutional Failures Faced by Migrant Labourers

Migrant labourers often suffer because the legal and institutional systems meant to protect them are weak or not properly implemented. One major issue is the lack of legal support. Many migrant workers lack written job contracts, identity documents, or awareness of their rights. Because of this, they find it difficult to complain when their wages are stolen or when they face abuse at the workplace. Most do not have access to legal aid or affordable lawyers, so their problems remain unresolved (Srivastava, 2020).

Although there are labour rights and labour laws in India- such as the Minimum Wages Act, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, and the new Labour Codes- these laws are rarely enforced in the unorganized sector. Employers often ignore rules regarding minimum wages, working

hours, safety measures, and payment of dues. Migrant workers are afraid to speak up because they fear losing their jobs or being replaced. This weak enforcement creates a gap between what the law promises and what workers actually experience (Breman, 2013).

There are also several welfare schemes, such as health insurance, social security, and migrant worker registration. However, many workers cannot access these benefits because of a lack of awareness, complicated procedures, language barriers, or frequent movement from one place to another. As a result, the schemes that should support them do not reach those who need them most (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Finally, the institutional response to migrant workers' problems is often slow and inadequate. Labour departments have limited staff and resources to monitor worksites or respond quickly to complaints. During crises-such as the COVID-19 lockdown-many migrant workers struggled to get transport, food, or cash support, showing how unprepared institutions are to respond to large-scale worker distress (Srivastava & Jha, 2021). This lack of effective institutions leaves migrant labourers unprotected and vulnerable to ongoing exploitation.

Psychological Problems Faced by Migrant Labourers

Migrant labourers often face serious psychological challenges because of the difficult conditions they live and work in. One major issue is mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress, sadness, and sometimes depression. These problems come from long working hours, unsafe jobs, low pay, and continuous uncertainty about the future (Saluja & Kumar, 2020).

A big cause of stress is financial insecurity. Since many migrant workers depend on daily wages, even one day without work can affect their ability to buy food or pay rent. Wage theft, delayed payments, and debt make this insecurity worse. Constant worry about money affects sleep, concentration, and emotional stability, increasing the risk of mental-health difficulties (Sinha, 2018).

Migrant workers also experience social isolation. They live far from their families and support systems, often in crowded worksites or temporary settlements where they have little privacy or comfort. Because they may not know the local language or culture, they struggle to build social connections. This isolation makes them feel lonely, disconnected, and unsupported during hard times (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Another important issue is emotional distress and grief. Migrants often miss important family events such as festivals, births, or funerals. When family members fall ill or pass away, many

workers are unable to travel home due to financial constraints or job restrictions. This creates deep emotional pain, guilt, and helplessness.

Grief becomes heavier because they cannot share it with close relatives or receive emotional support (Srivastava & Jha, 2021).

All these factors-mental strain, money problems, loneliness, and emotional loss- combine to negatively affect the mental health and wellbeing of migrant labourers. Without proper psychological support or social networks, many workers continue to struggle silently, making their lives even more vulnerable and stressful.

Living and Working Conditions of Migrant Labourers

Living and working conditions are among the most important factors affecting the wellbeing of migrant labourers in the unorganised sector. Many workers live in overcrowded temporary shelters, construction sites, rented rooms, or makeshift settlements with poor sanitation, limited access to clean drinking water, and inadequate electricity. These unhealthy living conditions increase the risk of infectious diseases and negatively affect their physical and mental health (Rajan, 2015).

At the workplace, migrant labourers are frequently exposed to hazardous environments without proper safety equipment or training. Construction workers, factory labourers, and sanitation workers often face risks such as falls, accidents, chemical exposure, and long working hours. Many employers fail to provide protective gear, medical assistance, or compensation in case of injury. Since most migrant workers are employed informally, they rarely receive occupational health benefits or insurance coverage (ILO, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the poor living and working conditions of migrant labourers. During the nationwide lockdown, thousands of workers lost their jobs, were left without food and shelter, and were forced to return to their native places under extremely difficult circumstances. The crisis exposed the absence of adequate housing, social protection, and emergency support for migrant workers in India (Aajeevika Bureau, 2020).

Poor housing, unsafe workplaces, lack of occupational safety measures, and inadequate access to basic services continue to affect the health, dignity, and quality of life of migrant labourers in the unorganized sector.

Access to Social Security and Government Welfare Schemes

Access to social security is essential for ensuring the wellbeing of migrant labourers, yet most workers in the unorganised sector remain excluded from formal welfare systems. Although several government programmes provide benefits such as health insurance, food security, pensions, and accident compensation, migrant workers often face difficulties in accessing these schemes due to a lack of documentation, low awareness, and frequent migration between states (ILO, 2021).

Portability of welfare benefits remains a significant challenge. Since many social security programmes are linked to workers' place of residence, migrants are often unable to access subsidised food, healthcare, or other benefits in their destination states. Administrative barriers, language differences, and complex registration procedures further reduce their participation in welfare programmes (Bhagat & Govil, 2020).

The introduction of the e-Shram portal and the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme represent important efforts to improve the social security coverage of unorganised workers and migrant labourers. However, several studies indicate that awareness of these initiatives remains low, digital literacy is limited, and registration gaps continue to prevent many eligible workers from receiving benefits (ILO, 2021).

The literature suggests that improving awareness, simplifying registration procedures, strengthening inter-state coordination, and ensuring portability of social security benefits are necessary to enhance the welfare and protection of migrant labourers in India.

Labour Rights Awareness and Collective Action Among Migrant Labourers

Awareness of labour rights plays an important role in protecting migrant labourers from exploitation. However, studies indicate that most migrant workers employed in the unorganised sector have very limited knowledge of labour laws, minimum wage provisions, grievance mechanisms, and government welfare schemes. Low levels of education, language barriers, dependence on contractors, and the absence of trade union representation prevent workers from understanding and exercising their legal rights (Srivastava, 2020). As a result, many migrant labourers accept unfair wages, excessive working hours, and unsafe working conditions without filing complaints.

Collective action through labour unions, workers' organisations, and civil society groups has been identified as an important mechanism for improving the living and working conditions of migrant labourers. Organisations working with migrant workers provide legal assistance,

awareness programmes, counselling, and support in accessing social security benefits. Research suggests that collective bargaining and community-based organisations increase workers' confidence in reporting wage theft and in demanding fair treatment from employers (Bremar, 2013).

Migration, Family Separation, and Social Wellbeing

Migration for employment has significant consequences for the family and social wellbeing of migrant labourers. Most migrant workers leave their families behind in their native villages to earn a livelihood, resulting in prolonged separation from spouses, children, and elderly parents. This separation often creates emotional distress, loneliness, and feelings of guilt, particularly when workers are unable to support family members during illness or emergencies (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). Long-distance migration also affects family relationships, childcare responsibilities, and the emotional development of children who grow up without the regular presence of one or both parents.

Despite these challenges, migration remains an important livelihood strategy for economically disadvantaged households. Remittances sent by migrant workers contribute significantly to household income, children's education, healthcare, and debt repayment. Studies have shown that although migration improves family income, it often comes at the cost of emotional wellbeing and social cohesion (Bhagat & Govil, 2020).

Coping Strategies and Survival Mechanisms Among Migrant Workers

Migrant workers in the unorganized sector develop many coping strategies to deal with job insecurity, low wages, and difficult living conditions. One common strategy is relying on social networks. Workers often stay close to people from their home village or state, share rooms, cook together, and support each other during illness or financial trouble. These small community groups help reduce loneliness and provide emotional comfort (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Another important survival mechanism is informal borrowing and saving. Because migrant workers rarely have access to banks or formal loans, they borrow money from friends, co-workers, or local shopkeepers. They also save small amounts whenever possible to manage future emergencies. This informal financial support helps them survive wage delays or sudden expenses (Sinha, 2018).

Many migrant workers also use job mobility as a coping method. When they face wage theft or poor treatment, they often shift to another employer, contractor, or worksite. Moving frequently gives them a chance to find slightly better wages or safer conditions, even though it does not guarantee stability (Breman, 2013).

Some workers cope by reducing expenses. They live in shared rooms, cook inexpensive meals, avoid transportation costs, and send most of their earnings home. Though this helps them survive in the city, it also makes their quality of life very basic and stressful (Srivastava, 2020).

Migrant workers also develop emotional coping strategies. They stay connected with their families through phone calls, find comfort in religious practices, and participate in community gatherings during festivals. These activities help them manage stress, homesickness, and loneliness (Saluja & Kumar, 2020).

Migrant laborers survive through a mix of social support, financial adjustments, movement between jobs, and emotional resilience. These strategies help them manage everyday challenges, but they do not solve the deeper problems of exploitation, insecurity, and lack of rights in the unorganized sector.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Precarious Labour Theory (Precarity Theory)

Precarious Labour Theory explains the insecure, unstable, and vulnerable conditions faced by workers engaged in informal and unregulated forms of employment. The theory highlights how changes in labour markets have increased temporary employment, low wages, lack of social security, and uncertainty among workers. According to Guy Standing (2011), the growth of precarious employment has created a new social group called the “precariat,” characterized by insecure work conditions, unstable income, limited labour rights, and weak representation.

Migrant labourers in the unorganized sector often experience such precarity because they are employed through informal arrangements without written contracts, job security, or adequate legal protection. Their dependence on contractors and employers increases their vulnerability to wage theft, delayed payments, and unfair wage deductions. This theory helps explain wage theft as a result of broader structural inequalities within informal labour systems rather than as an individual workplace issue.

Marxist Theory of Alienation

Marxist Theory of Alienation, developed by Karl Marx, explains how workers become separated from their work, the products they create, and their sense of control and identity under exploitative economic conditions. Marx (1844) argued that when workers do not receive fair value for their labour and have limited control over the production process, they experience alienation. Migrant labourers in the unorganized sector frequently face alienation due to exploitative working conditions, low wages, lack of recognition, and limited bargaining power. Wage theft directly contributes to alienation because workers are denied the economic benefits of their own labour. Continuous experiences of exploitation may lead to feelings of powerlessness, loss of dignity, and social exclusion.

This theory is relevant to the present study as it helps understand the psychological and social impacts of wage theft on migrant workers beyond their economic struggles.

2.4 RESEARCH GAP ANALYSIS

Existing studies on migrant labourers mainly rely on surveys and secondary data, which explain wages, employment patterns, and migration trends but offer limited insight into workers' lived experiences. There is a lack of qualitative studies that capture how migrant labourers personally experience wage theft, job insecurity, and lack of legal protection in the unorganised sector.

Further, most research examines economic and legal issues separately, with little focus on their psychological impact. The everyday coping strategies and resilience of migrant workers are also underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by using a qualitative approach to understand migrant workers' experiences, emotional wellbeing, and survival strategies in a real-life context.

CHAPTER - III
METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology involves the plans and procedures for research, including decisions about the research design, data collection methods, data analysis, and the interpretation of results. The choice of methodology depends on the nature of the research problem and the type of information required (Creswell,2014).

This chapter explains the methodology used in the study. It describes how the research was planned and conducted systematically. The study aims to understand the experiences of migrant labourers, particularly issues such as wage theft, job insecurity, and feelings of alienation. Since these are personal and complex issues, a qualitative research approach was used to collect detailed information. This chapter includes the research design, a description of the study area and participants, the sampling method, and the tools used for data collection, such as interviews and observations. It also explains how the data was analysed using thematic analysis. The chapter discusses the ethical considerations followed in the study, as well as the assumptions, limitations, and scope of the research. It also provides a clear understanding of how the study was carried out.

3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY

Surviving Precarity: A Study on Wage Theft and Alienation among Migrant Labourers in the Unorganised Sector.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

General Research Question

What is the nature of wage theft experienced by migrant workers in Thiruvananthapuram, and how does it shape their lived social, economic, and psychological experiences?

Specific Research Questions

- What forms of wage theft are commonly experienced by migrant workers in Thiruvananthapuram?
- What are the key factors contributing to wage theft among these workers (e.g., employer practices, legal gaps, lack of documentation)?
- How do migrant workers perceive and respond to incidents of wage theft?

- What social, economic, and psychological impacts does wage theft have on the lives of migrant workers?
- What coping mechanisms or support systems (formal or informal) are available to affected workers?
- How effective are existing labour laws and enforcement mechanisms in addressing wage theft among migrant workers?

3.4 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Precarity

Conceptual Definition: precarity is associated with the rise of the “precariat,” a social group characterized by insecure jobs, unstable earnings, weak labour rights, and limited access to workplace benefits (Standing, 2011).

Operational Definition: In this study, precarity refers to the condition of insecurity and uncertainty experienced by migrant labourers working in the unorganized sector. It includes unstable employment, irregular and insufficient income, absence of written contracts, lack of social security and legal protection, unsafe working conditions, and the constant risk of job loss or wage theft. Precarity is understood through the participants' lived experiences of economic, social, and employment insecurity.

Wage Theft

Conceptual Definition: Wage theft occurs when employers do not pay workers the wages they have earned, making it a significant form of labour exploitation, especially among migrant and informal workers (Bobo, 2009).

Operational Definition: In this study, wage theft refers to any situation in which migrant labourers are denied the wages or employment benefits they have legally or verbally earned. It includes delayed payment of wages, underpayment, non-payment for work performed, illegal deductions, unpaid overtime, withholding of wages, or any other unfair wage-related practices experienced by the respondents.

Alienation

Conceptual Definition: Alienation is the feeling of isolation and disconnection that workers experience from their work, society, and even themselves (Marx, 1844).

Operational Definition: In this study, alienation refers to the feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, isolation, lack of belonging, and dissatisfaction experienced by migrant labourers due to exploitative working conditions, insecure employment, poor working relationships, and limited control over their work and lives. It is assessed through the workers' own experiences and perceptions.

Migrant Labourers

Conceptual Definition: Migrant labour is primarily absorbed into the secondary labour market, characterized by unstable, low-wage, and low-status jobs, which local workers avoid. Migration is thus a response to structural demand rather than just an individual choice (Piore, 1979).

Operational Definition: In this study, migrant labourers refer to individuals who have moved from their native place to another district or state in search of employment and are engaged in unorganized sector occupations such as construction, domestic work, street vending, loading and unloading, and other informal jobs. The study focuses on migrant workers who have been working in the unorganized sector for at least six months.

Unorganized Sector

Conceptual Definition: The unorganised (informal) sector consists of private unincorporated enterprises that produce goods or services for sale or barter and are characterized by a low level of organization, small scale of operation, and limited or no social protection for workers. (ILO, 2018)

Operational Definition: In this study, the unorganized sector refers to economic activities and workplaces that operate outside formal government regulation and labour protection. It includes small, informal, and unregistered enterprises where workers generally lack written contracts, social security, job security, and other employment benefits.

3.5 PILOT STUDY

The researcher conducted a pilot study at Loyola Extension Services, where the Loyola Jeevika Migrant Cell works for migrant labourers and their issues.

During the visit, the trainee met the coordinator of the migrant cell, Mr. Pramod, and explained the research topic and its purpose. After a brief discussion, the coordinator shared reports maintained by the cell. These reports included different problems faced by migrant workers, along with their ID details and related documents. The trainee carefully read and understood these records.

After this, the trainee met the key informant, Br. Peter, who works closely with migrant labourers and helps them solve their problems. He provided a clear understanding of the major issues faced by migrant workers, such as legal difficulties, social discrimination, and challenges navigating the system. He also explained how the local community treats migrant workers.

Br. Peter guided the trainee and gave useful suggestions for conducting the research effectively. This pilot study helped the trainee gain a basic understanding of the field and refine the research approach.

3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data, aimed at combining relevance to the research purpose with procedural efficiency. It provides a blueprint for conducting research and helps the researcher decide on the methods, tools, sampling techniques, and procedures required for the study (Kothari, 2004).

This study used a qualitative research design. It focused on understanding the experiences, feelings, and challenges faced by migrant labourers. A descriptive approach was used to explain their real-life situations in detail.

3.7 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

Research Site:

The present study was conducted in Sreekariyam, a rapidly developing suburban area in the Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. Sreekariyam has experienced significant urban growth in recent years, leading to an increased demand for labour in the construction, plumbing,

electrical, painting, gardening, and other informal sectors. As a result, the area has become a major destination for migrant workers from states such as West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh.

Most migrant labourers are engaged in daily-wage employment through contractors or subcontractors and often experience irregular employment, low wages, and limited social security. Many workers reside in rented accommodations near construction sites or workplaces, often in overcrowded, inadequate living conditions.

The presence of a large migrant population, along with the prevalence of informal employment and reported instances of wage-related issues, makes Sreekariyam an appropriate setting for examining wage theft, labour exploitation, and the lived experiences of migrant workers in the unorganized sector.

Participants:

The participants in the study comprised migrant workers from different states of India who were employed in the unorganized sector in Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram. The study included both male and female migrant workers to capture a range of experiences related to wage theft, labour exploitation, working conditions, and migration. The participants had migrated primarily due to poverty, unemployment, low agricultural income, and family responsibilities in their native places.

The respondents were engaged in various forms of informal employment, including construction labour, plumbing, gardening, and domestic work. Construction labourers were involved in physically demanding tasks such as masonry, concreting, loading and unloading materials, and other manual work.

3.8 SAMPLING STRATEGY

Sampling involves selecting individuals, groups, or cases from a target population in a way that enables the researcher to collect meaningful data aligned with the research objectives. The choice of sampling strategy depends on the nature of the research, research design, objectives, and availability of participants (Creswell, 2023)

The study used purposive sampling. The researcher selected participants who are migrant labourers and have experienced issues like wage theft or alienation.

A small number of participants (for example, 10 workers) were selected based on availability and willingness to participate.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION

The data for the present study were collected through qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by migrant labourers in the unorganized sector.

In-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their personal experiences related to wage theft, job insecurity, workplace conditions, and social challenges. Informal conversations were also conducted to build rapport and trust with the participants, which helped collect more detailed information about their everyday realities and lived experiences.

Additionally, non-participant observation was used to understand the living and working conditions of migrant labourers, including their work environment, accommodation, and social interactions.

An interview guide was prepared and used to ensure that key areas, such as wages, working conditions, access to rights and benefits, and social life, were covered during data collection.

These methods helped the researcher obtain rich, meaningful information about migrant workers' experiences and the factors contributing to their precarity.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of organizing, interpreting, and making meaning from the collected data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships relevant to the research objectives. Qualitative data analysis involves preparing the data, coding the information, developing themes, and interpreting the findings to understand participants' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2018).

In this study, the data collected through in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. The responses of migrant labourers were carefully reviewed, coded, and grouped into major themes related to wage theft, workplace insecurity, alienation, living conditions, and challenges faced in the unorganized sector.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Common themes identified

- Economic Insecurity and Wage Exploitation
- Informal Employment and Lack of Labour Protection
- Migrant Worker Vulnerability and Structural Disadvantage
- Challenging Living and Working Conditions
- Family Responsibility and Migration as a Survival Strategy
- Emotional Stress and Resilience

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researcher strictly followed ethical principles throughout the study to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants. The following ethical considerations were maintained:

- **Informed consent** was obtained from all participants before conducting the interviews. The researcher explained the nature of the study, and participants agreed to take part willingly.
- **Voluntary participation** was ensured. Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences.
- **Confidentiality** was maintained by keeping participants' identities and personal information confidential. No names or identifying details were disclosed in the research report.
- **Privacy** was respected by conducting interviews in a comfortable, appropriate setting, ensuring participants could speak freely without fear of being overheard.
- **Respect and dignity** of every participant were upheld throughout the research process. The researcher treated all participants with courtesy and empathy without discrimination.
- **Accurate representation** of data was maintained. The researcher reported participants' responses honestly without fabrication, manipulation, or misrepresentation.
- **Cultural sensitivity** was maintained by respecting participants' language, customs, beliefs, and sociocultural backgrounds during data collection.

- **Research integrity** was maintained by conducting the study honestly and objectively, in accordance with accepted ethical standards for social work research.

These ethical principles helped ensure that the research was conducted responsibly while safeguarding the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants.

3.12 ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

Assumptions

The study was conducted based on the following assumptions:

- All participants will provide honest, accurate, and truthful information during the interviews.
- The experiences shared by the participants will reflect their actual living and working conditions in the unorganized sector.
- The selected participants will have sufficient knowledge and experience to provide meaningful information relevant to the study's objectives.
- The interview questions will be understood correctly by the participants, and their responses will reflect their genuine opinions and experiences.
- The data collected from the participants will be adequate to understand the socio-economic, occupational, and psychological challenges faced by migrant labourers.
- The participants will be willing to cooperate with the researcher throughout the data collection process.

Limitations

Despite careful planning, the study had certain limitations:

- The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size; therefore, the findings may not represent the experiences of all migrant labourers working in the unorganised sector.
- The study was limited to a specific geographical area, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other regions or states.
- Language differences between the researcher and some participants occasionally created communication challenges, even though efforts were made to ensure mutual understanding.

- Some participants were hesitant to speak openly about issues such as wages, exploitation, and working conditions due to fear of employers, contractors, or possible loss of employment.
- Since the study relied on self-reported information, there is a possibility of recall bias or socially desirable responses.
- Time constraints limited the duration of fieldwork and the number of participants who could be included in the study.
- The study focused only on migrant labourers employed in the unorganized sector and did not include workers from the organized sector for comparison.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study includes the following:

- The study focuses on migrant labourers employed in the unorganized sector. It examines the socio-economic, occupational, and psychological challenges experienced by migrant workers.
- The study explores issues such as employment conditions, wages, job insecurity, living conditions, access to basic services, social security benefits, and legal protection.
- It identifies the coping strategies adopted by migrant labourers to manage their daily challenges.
- The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of the problems faced by migrant labourers and provide useful insights for social workers, researchers, NGOs, and policymakers in designing welfare programmes and policy interventions.
- The study also provides a foundation for future research on migrant labour, labour rights, social protection, and the welfare of workers in the unorganized sector.

CHAPTER - IV
CASE DESCRIPTIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the case descriptions of the participants who took part in the study. The purpose of presenting these cases is to provide a detailed understanding of the personal backgrounds, work experiences, living conditions, and challenges faced by migrant labourers in the unorganized sector.

Each case description highlights the individual experiences of the participants, including their migration journeys, employment conditions, wage-related issues, workplace insecurity, and social difficulties. By presenting the cases separately, the chapter helps to capture the diverse realities of migrant workers and provides a contextual foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

4.2 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Client A is a 32-year-old male migrant worker from Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal. He is currently residing in Sreekariyam, Kerala. He belongs to a nuclear family consisting of his wife and daughter and is married. He has completed his higher secondary education (12th standard). He works as a daily wage labourer in the construction sector.

Client B is a 24-year-old female migrant worker from South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. She is currently residing in Cheruvaikkal, Kerala. She belongs to a nuclear family consisting of her daughter, father, and mother. She is divorced and has completed education up to the 7th standard. She works as a domestic worker in the unorganized sector.

Client C is a 40-year-old male migrant worker from Purba Medinipur, West Bengal. He is currently residing in Cheruvaikkal, Kerala. He belongs to a nuclear family consisting of his wife and daughter and is married. He is uneducated and works as a helper in the construction sector.

Client D is a 22-year-old male migrant worker from Malda, West Bengal. He is currently residing in Sreekariyam, Kerala. He belongs to a family consisting of his father, mother, younger brother, and two sisters. He is unmarried and is pursuing his first year of graduation. He works as a daily wage worker in the construction sector.

Client E is a 24-year-old male migrant worker from Malda, West Bengal. He is currently residing in Sreekariyam, Kerala. He belongs to a family consisting of his father, mother,

younger brother, and sister. He is unmarried and has completed education up to the 9th standard. He works as a plumber and construction labour.

Client F is a 30-year-old male migrant worker from Assam. He is currently residing in Sreekariyam, Kerala. He belongs to a family consisting of his father, mother, wife, and three-year-old son. He has never attended school and works as a gardener

4.3 CASE DESCRIPTIONS

CASE A

Case A is a 32-year-old migrant worker from Purba Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Currently, he lives near the Radio station in Sreekariyam with his wife and their eight-year-old daughter, while his parents and siblings continue to reside in West Bengal.

He studied up to 12th standard and spent his early years working alongside his father in agriculture. Farming was his family's primary occupation, but it did not provide a stable or sufficient income. During the off-season or whenever there was an opportunity, he also did small electrical repair work in nearby villages to supplement the family's earnings. Despite his willingness to work hard, the income remained irregular and inadequate. Gradually, financial pressure increased, especially after marriage and the birth of his daughter. With limited opportunities in his native place and increasing responsibilities, He decided to migrate to Kerala seven years ago in search of better livelihood options. His decision to migrate was not driven by ambition or personal growth, but by necessity. He carried with him the hope that migration would bring stability, dignity, and financial security for his family.

His father still depends on farming, and Swar tries to send small amounts of money home whenever possible. However, his own family situation in Kerala is deeply challenging. His daughter was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy when she was a baby. She is unable to walk, speak, sit independently, or perform basic daily activities. She depends entirely on her parents for feeding, cleaning, positioning, and emotional support. She requires constant care, regular medication, and nutritious food to maintain her fragile health. Caring for a child with such a condition requires both physical strength and emotional resilience, something the family struggles to maintain under financial stress.

Adding to this burden, His wife recently underwent surgery related to her uterus. She is still recovering and experiences weakness and discomfort. Despite her physical condition, she

continues to take care of their daughter because there is no one else to assist them. There are no relatives nearby, and the couple manages everything on their own. Case A is the sole breadwinner of the family. The entire responsibility of house rent, electricity and water bills, groceries, medical expenses, and remittances to his parents falls completely on him. The pressure of being the only earning member weighs heavily on him, and it is evident in his expressions and tone of voice.

Case A works as a daily wage labourer in the construction field. At the construction site, Swarup does heavy physical work such as carrying cement bags, bricks, sand, and steel rods. He mixes cement and supplies it to masons during bricklaying and plastering. He also assists skilled workers by passing tools and materials and sometimes helps dig foundations or unload materials from trucks. The work is tiring and done for long hours under the sun, but he continues it to earn a daily wage and support his family. His employment is irregular and unpredictable. Some days he receives work at construction sites or on manual labour tasks, but many times he remains unemployed for 10 to 15 consecutive days. During those periods, there is no income at all. Even when he gets work, the wages are low compared to those of local labourers. He reported that migrant workers often receive less pay and face frequent wage delays.

During the interaction, he shared that he does not always receive his full wages on time. Sometimes payments are delayed for many weeks, and sometimes he is paid less than what was promised. There is no written agreement between him and the contractor, so everything is decided verbally. Because of this, he has no proof to question the employer when money is deducted.

He said that deductions are made without proper explanation. Overtime work is not always paid, and when it is, it is less than the pay given to local workers. Even after working long hours in difficult conditions, he is not sure whether he will receive his full payment. This creates constant tension in his mind.

He continues *“Didimoni, we work full day under the sun, sometimes even overtime, but when payment time comes, the contractor cuts money without any proper reason”*. He says cement was wasted, work was slow, or there was some mistake. But we don’t even know how much is correct. Sometimes they delay payment for weeks. We keep asking, but they say, *“Next week, next week.. How can we survive like this? We have to send money home, pay room rent, and buy food. When wages are not given on time, everything gets disturbed”*.

He is afraid to speak up about wage theft because he may lose his job. As a migrant worker, he lacks strong support or protection. He feels that if he questions the contractor, he might not be called for work again. Because of this fear, he continues working even while his previous wages are pending.

Wage theft has caused serious problems in his life. Since he is the primary earner for his family, they depend on his income. When he does not receive full wages, he cannot send enough money home. This creates difficulty in managing daily expenses like food, house rent, electricity bills, and medical needs. Sometimes the family may need to borrow money, which increases financial pressure.

The situation also affects him emotionally. He feels stressed and worried most of the time. Even after working hard, he feels that his labour is not respected. He experiences frustration and helplessness but keeps quiet because he has no other job option. The uncertainty of payment makes him anxious about the future.

In Case A, wage theft is not only about money. It affects his dignity, mental peace, and family stability. It keeps him in a cycle of insecurity and fear, where he works hard but does not receive fair treatment.

Unpaid wages also trap him in the same employment arrangement. If he leaves, he risks losing the money he has already worked hard for. There is no written agreement, no insurance, and no safety measures at his workplace. If he falls ill or gets injured, there is no compensation or support. The absence of job security creates constant anxiety. Each day without work feels like a threat to his family's survival.

During the home visit, the family's economic hardship was clearly evident. The kitchen shelves were nearly empty. Only a few eggs, some potatoes, and dried chillies were present in a small basket. There were very few utensils, and no stock of rice, vegetables, or other groceries was visible. He looked at the shelves, *"Look, you can see there is nothing in my kitchen. Sometimes my wife and I skip meals at night and in the morning. We eat only once a day because I don't have money. I don't feel good borrowing money from others."* His words reflected not only financial struggle but also a sense of dignity and reluctance to depend on others. He appeared ashamed that he could not provide adequately for his family.

When speaking about his daughter's nutritional needs, his eyes became teary. *"I can't even provide Horlicks for my child. She takes medicine and needs good food. But I cannot give. I*

feel very disappointed and sad. I don't know what to do." His voice trembled as he spoke. It was evident that his greatest pain was not his own hunger but the inability to meet his daughter's needs. The emotional weight of this responsibility seemed to burden him deeply.

The family has been living for the past fourteen months in a single-room rented house with one attached bathroom. The house is extremely small and congested. The same room serves as a bedroom, kitchen, and living space. A small stove is placed in one corner for cooking. The bed occupies most of the room, as their daughter lies on it throughout the day due to her condition. There is barely any space to move around. Managing daily activities in such a confined space is extremely difficult. Caring for a child with special needs in such a limited space requires continuous physical effort.

Basic facilities such as water, electricity, and sanitation are available, but the overall environment remains cramped and inadequate. Clothes are hung along the walls due to a lack of storage space. Drinking water is stored in reused plastic bottles. There is no separate cupboard or proper furniture. Other tenants live adjacent to their room, but there is minimal social interaction. The family appears socially isolated, focusing entirely on survival and caregiving.

Despite the poverty and lack of space, the room was kept clean and organized. This reflected their effort to maintain dignity in their living condition. The bed was neatly arranged, and the utensils were cleaned and properly stacked. The couple has adapted to the limited space, adjusting their movements and routines around their daughter's needs.

Throughout the interaction, he remained attentive to his daughter. He gently patted her, adjusted her position, caressed her hair, and wiped her saliva with a towel. She lay comfortably in his lap during most of the conversation. Even as he discussed financial stress, he paused to ensure she was comfortable. His wife stood near the doorway, appearing weak but supportive. She occasionally added details to what her husband said. Though tired from surgery and daily caregiving responsibilities, she remained emotionally connected and cooperative.

Case A appeared emotionally distressed during the discussion. His eyes filled with tears when he spoke about his helplessness as a father and husband. He expressed guilt over skipping his wife's follow-up treatment twice due to a lack of money. He also mentioned feeling restless and anxious during days without work. The pressure of bills, rent, and medical expenses constantly troubles him. He internalizes his worries rather than expressing anger or frustration

outwardly. His sadness seems quiet but deep. There is a visible burden of responsibility in his posture and tone.

Case A reflects the multiple vulnerabilities faced by migrant labourers, particularly those managing chronic illness within the family. It highlights economic insecurity, the absence of labour protection, healthcare burden, and emotional strain. At the same time, it reveals resilience and strong family bonding. Despite severe hardship, the couple continues to support each other. His affectionate care toward his daughter and his wife's emotional presence indicate strong family attachment.

This case shows how poverty, migration, health challenges, and unstable employment intersect to create layered vulnerability. Yet within this struggle, there remains dignity, parental love, and endurance. He continues to search for work every day, hoping that tomorrow may bring some relief. His life reflects not only hardship but also the strength of a father determined to protect and care for his family despite overwhelming adversity.

In the field, the researcher saw Case A engaged in manual labour, carrying construction materials and working continuously under the sun. He was not wearing proper safety equipment, such as gloves or a helmet, at the time, indicating a lack of safety measures at the site. The working environment appeared risky, with scattered materials, uneven surfaces, and simultaneous construction activities. Workers seemed to manage tasks on their own.

The trainee also observed that he looked physically exhausted and sweaty, yet he continued working without complaint. During a short break, he sat on the ground with other workers because no proper resting area was provided. Drinking water was stored in a common container, and sanitation facilities were absent. From informal interactions at the site, it was understood that workers often work long hours, depending on contractor demand.

The trainee noticed that when the topic of wages came up, Case A's expression changed, and he became slightly uncomfortable. He mentioned that payments are sometimes delayed and deductions are made without a clear explanation. There was no written record of wages at the site. The trainee sensed insecurity among the workers, as they depended entirely on the contractor for employment. The field visit helped the trainee understand the harsh physical conditions, lack of safety measures, and the vulnerability of workers like Swaroop at the construction site.

CASE B

Case B is a woman migrant worker from the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. She is in her late twenties and currently lives in Cheruvaikkal, near Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram. She has been residing in Kerala for the past four years. Sonali is a single mother of a seven-year-old daughter who lives with her grandparents in her native village. Her parents are taking care of the child as Sonali is unable to bring her daughter to Kerala due to financial and housing constraints.

Case B comes from a poor agricultural family. Farming was the primary occupation of her household, but the income was irregular and highly dependent on seasonal changes. Since childhood, she has been involved in household chores and agricultural activities. She studied up to the 7th standard but had to discontinue her education due to poverty and family responsibilities. She shared that from a young age, survival was more important than schooling. Her childhood was marked by economic hardship, limited opportunities, and early exposure to labour.

She was married at a young age to a man from the same village. Initially, she hoped that marriage would provide stability and support. However, her marital life soon turned distressing. Her husband was an alcoholic and often behaved abusively. There were frequent conflicts and emotional as well as physical violence. Over time, the situation worsened, and he eventually eloped with another woman, abandoning her and their child. This incident left her emotionally shattered and financially helpless.

With no financial support from her husband and the increasing responsibilities of raising her daughter, she had no choice but to seek work outside her village.

Migration to Kerala was not an easy decision for her. It was a step taken out of compulsion rather than choice. She migrated to Thiruvananthapuram four years ago through informal contacts from her village who were already working in domestic labour. The primary reason for migration was to earn money for her daughter's education and daily household expenses. In her village, employment opportunities for women were fewer, and wages were extremely low. Agricultural work was seasonal and unpredictable. Therefore, migration became the only viable option for survival.

Currently, Case B works as a domestic worker in multiple households. She goes to different houses daily and performs various tasks such as sweeping, mopping floors, washing utensils

and clothes, cleaning bathrooms, dusting furniture, and sometimes cooking. In some houses, she is hired only for cooking, while in others she is responsible for all household chores. The wage is determined by the type and quantity of work she does in each house.

However, she explained that the nature of work often changes over time. In the beginning, employers may say that only cleaning and cooking are required for a fixed amount of money. But gradually, additional tasks are added without any increase in wages. She said that cleaning gradually extends to washing clothes, arranging children's toys, wiping down doors and windows, and even running small errands. Despite the increase in workload, the salary remains the same. She feels helpless to question this because she fears losing her job.

Her working hours are long and physically exhausting. She starts early in the morning and moves from one household to another without sufficient breaks. There is no fixed working time. During festival seasons like Onam and Vishu, the workload increases significantly. Houses require additional cleaning, special cooking, and preparation for guests. However, she does not receive any extra payment for the extra hours of work. *"During festivals, work increases but salary remains the same."*

One of her major concerns is wage delay. She is supposed to receive her wages in the first week of every month. However, employers often delay payment. Sometimes wages are delayed by several weeks or even a full month. In certain situations, employers pay only half the amount and promise to pay the rest later. This irregular payment severely affects her family back home. Every month by the 10th, she sends money to her parents for her daughter's food, school fees, tuition, clothes, and other daily expenses. When wages are delayed, her parents call her asking for money, as they have no other source of income. This creates immense stress for her.

She also shared that if she takes even a single day of leave due to illness, her wages are cut for that day. There is no concept of paid leave or medical support. Even when she is physically unwell, she forces herself to go to work because missing work means losing money. Continuous bending, lifting heavy water buckets, and standing for long hours have caused body pain and fatigue. She often experiences back pain and weakness but ignores it due to economic necessity.

Case B feels that migrant workers like her are paid less compared to local women workers for similar work. She believes that being an outsider makes her more vulnerable to exploitation. Employers sometimes hesitate to pay on time, and she senses a lack of trust toward migrant workers. She mentioned that her biggest fear is when something valuable, like money or gold,

goes missing in a house. She constantly worries that she may be blamed for theft. This fear forces her to remain extremely careful and vigilant while working. She said that she always works with a sense of alertness, ensuring she does not touch anything unnecessarily.

In some houses, she feels respected and maintains a good relationship with her employers. However, in other households, she is treated as inferior. Some employers speak harshly and closely monitor her work. She feels that domestic work is often not recognised as dignified labour. She has no written agreement or job security. She can be asked not to come back at any time without notice. This insecurity keeps her in constant anxiety about losing work.

She also shared uncomfortable experiences where male members of certain households tried to get overly friendly or emotionally attached. A few have approached her inappropriately. She carefully avoids such situations and continues to work silently, as she cannot afford to lose her job. These experiences make her feel unsafe at times, but she chooses not to confront directly due to fear of job loss.

Case B lives in a small single-room house upstairs in a building. The room includes a small kitchen and a toilet. Basic facilities such as electricity and water are available, but the space is congested and poorly maintained. She lives with her sister and brother-in-law, yet she often feels lonely. Despite having relatives around, her emotional distance from her daughter leaves her feeling incomplete.

Most of her earnings are sent back home. She keeps very little money for herself. She rarely buys clothes or personal items. Her entire focus is on providing better opportunities for her daughter. She repeatedly expressed that her only dream is to earn enough to ensure her daughter receives a good education, nutritious food, and a secure future.

Psychologically, she experiences high levels of stress and anxiety. She becomes extremely worried when wages are delayed. She shared that she sometimes cries alone at night thinking that she is not a good mother because the money she earns is insufficient. Living away from her child causes deep emotional pain, *"I am a mother. How can I live without my child? I feel like running back to her, but I am helpless."* These words reflect her emotional conflict between economic survival and motherhood.

Her husband's abandonment left her with a sense of insecurity and betrayal. She fears the future, especially the possibility of becoming jobless or facing sudden wage cuts. She has no

savings or Social Security benefits. The uncertainty of domestic work makes her anxious about long-term stability.

Despite these hardships, she shows resilience. She has developed strong peer support among other domestic workers in the area. They share information about available jobs, wage rates, and employers. They also provide emotional support and help each other during crises. This informal network helps her cope with loneliness and stress.

Physically, she appears healthy, but continuous work pressure and mental stress affect her well-being. She suppresses her emotional pain and focuses on survival. Her life revolves around work, remittance, and hope. Hope to reunite with her daughter permanently one day. Hope that her daughter's life will be different from her own. Hope that education will break the cycle of poverty.

Case B's story reflects the lived realities of many migrant domestic workers. Her migration was not a matter of ambition but of necessity. Economic hardship, marital breakdown, and lack of local employment forced her to leave her home. She faces exploitation, wage insecurity, social discrimination, and emotional isolation on a daily basis. Yet she continues to work with determination because her daughter's future depends on her earnings.

Her case highlights issues such as wage delay, lack of job security, absence of written contracts, gender-based vulnerability, psychological stress, and poor living conditions. At the same time, it also shows resilience, maternal commitment, and the importance of peer support systems among migrant workers.

Case B lives each day balancing fear and hope: the fear of losing her job, the fear of being falsely blamed, the fear of not earning enough, and the hope that one day her sacrifices will ensure a better life for her daughter.

CASE C

Case C is a 40-year-old male migrant worker originally from the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal. He currently resides in Cheruvaikkal near Sreekariyam in Thiruvananthapuram, along with a group of other migrant workers. His wife and young daughter continue to live in their native village in West Bengal. He belongs to a nuclear family consisting of his wife and daughter, and he considers himself the sole breadwinner of the household. The responsibility of maintaining his family is on his shoulders.

He never had the opportunity to attend school. From a very young age, he assisted his father in agricultural activities and fishing. Their family depended on small-scale farming and fishing for survival. He used to catch fish and sell them in nearby households to earn a small income. However, the earnings were never sufficient to support the family. There were frequent periods of unemployment, especially during off-seasons when fishing and farming activities were limited. Poverty and lack of stable livelihood opportunities forced him to start working early in life.

As he grew older, he began taking up different kinds of manual labour work. He worked as a painter, mason helper, and head load worker in his village and nearby areas. Despite working hard, the wages were low and irregular. There was no steady source of income, and he often struggled to meet daily household expenses. The growing needs of his family, especially after the birth of his daughter, made him feel anxious and helpless. He realized that staying in the village would not provide a secure future for his child.

Around ten years ago, he migrated to Kerala and worked in different places here in search of better job opportunities and higher wages. Like many migrant workers from West Bengal, he chose Thiruvananthapuram after hearing from others that construction work was available here. Migration was not an easy decision for him. It meant staying away from his wife and daughter for long periods. However, he believed that earning more money was necessary to ensure a better life for his family.

At present, he works in the construction sector as a helper. His work mainly involves bricklaying, plastering, mixing cement, carrying materials, and assisting in structural construction. The nature of his work is physically demanding and risky. His employment is not permanent. Some days there is work, and some days there is none. When work is available, the working hours are long and uncertain. Sometimes he works from early morning until late

evening without proper rest breaks. During peak construction periods, he may work continuously for many hours under the hot sun.

His wages are paid either daily or weekly. However, payments are often delayed or irregular. He shared that local Malayali workers are usually paid higher wages for the same type of work. Often, he receives almost half the wage paid to local workers. He is aware of this discrimination but does not question the employer for fear of losing his job. According to him, “*Some work is better than no work.*” He feels that arguing with the employer may result in being replaced by another worker.

One of the most severe experiences he recounted involved wage theft during his employment at a biogas company. He worked there for one month. Initially, the employer paid him a small advance, which led him to believe he would receive full payment upon completion of the work. However, after the work was completed, the employer refused to pay the remaining wages. The employer gave repeated excuses, avoided phone calls, and was often unavailable. He once visited him personally to ask for the money. Seeing that the employer was an elderly man, he felt pity and decided to give him more time. He believed that the man would eventually pay him.

However, months passed, and the payment never came. Whenever he tried to contact him, the employer avoided him. He even changed his contact number. He eventually stopped following up because it was emotionally exhausting. The unpaid wages were significant for him. That month’s income could have covered his daughter’s school expenses and household needs. The loss deeply affected him. He felt cheated and powerless. He said that at one point he considered filing a complaint with the nearby police station. But he was afraid. Being a migrant worker, he believed that the police would not support him. He feared harassment or trouble. He felt that as an outsider, his voice would not be heard. This fear and lack of trust in the system prevented him from seeking justice.

The wage theft incident had a severe emotional impact on him. He described feelings of anger, frustration, and helplessness. He questioned his own decision to trust the employer. He felt ashamed that he could not send sufficient money home that month. His wife had to borrow money from neighbours to manage household expenses. This made him feel guilty and stressed. Even now, when he talks about the incident, he becomes quiet and upset. The experience has made him cautious but also more fearful. He no longer easily trusts contractors.

Financial instability is a constant source of stress in his life. Due to irregular wages and occasional unemployment, he finds it difficult to plan his finances. Some months, he is able to send money home regularly, but in others, the amount is lower. He worries continuously about his daughter's education and daily expenses at home. He wants his daughter to study well and have a better future. His own lack of education makes him determined to support her schooling. However, income uncertainty creates constant anxiety. He often loses sleep thinking about financial responsibilities.

Case C has also faced several occupational hazards. Construction work exposes him to dangerous conditions. Once, he fell from a staircase at a building site and broke his leg. He had to remain without work for several months because his leg was plastered. During that period, he had no income. There was no compensation or medical support from the employer. He had to depend on savings and help from co-workers. Another time, a heavy concrete slab fell on his foot, causing severe pain and swelling. He continued working despite the injury because he could not afford to rest.

He also mentioned that concrete dust frequently falls into his eyes while working. On several occasions, he was unable to open his eyes for one or two days due to irritation and pain. Safety equipment such as helmets, gloves, and protective glasses is rarely provided at the worksite. Workers are often asked to climb heights without proper safety measures. Despite the risks, they continue working because they need the wages. He believes that if he refuses risky tasks, the employer may replace him.

His living conditions in Kerala are also poor. He shares a rented house with other migrant workers. The house is old, with a broken tile roof. During rainy seasons, water leaks into the room. The walls are damp, and the space is overcrowded. There is no proper pipe water connection, so they have to carry water from the roadside. Sanitation facilities are inadequate. These conditions make daily life uncomfortable and tiring. After a long day of physical labour, he returns to a house that offers little comfort.

Despite these hardships, He maintains good relationships with his co-workers. They provide emotional and sometimes financial support to each other. During times of illness or injury, they contribute small amounts of money to help the affected worker. This sense of community helps him cope with loneliness and stress. Since his family is far away, his co-workers have become his support system here.

Case C is not aware of any government social security schemes or labour welfare benefits available to migrant workers. He does not possess adequate documentation in Kerala to access welfare services. He has never received insurance coverage or health benefits related to his work. Lack of awareness and guidance prevents him from accessing potential support systems.

Emotionally, he appears tired and burdened by responsibility. He rarely expresses his feelings openly but admits to constant tension. The fear of losing work, the experience of wage theft, and the risk of injury create ongoing insecurity. He feels that being a migrant makes him vulnerable *“this is not my place, and therefore I must remain silent to survive”*

His case reflects the harsh realities faced by migrant construction workers. He experiences wage discrimination, severe wage theft, unsafe working conditions, poor living standards, and emotional distress due to financial instability. Yet, he continues working because he has no alternative source of income and must support his family. His story highlights the urgent need for legal protection, fair wage practices, occupational safety measures, and awareness of social security schemes for migrant workers. It also shows the silent suffering and resilience of individuals who sacrifice their comfort and safety to ensure a better future for their families.

During the field visit, the trainee observed that he was living in a very congested, poorly maintained rented house with seven other migrant workers. The room was small for the number of people staying there. Bedding materials were spread closely on the floor, leaving very little walking space. Personal belongings were kept in plastic bags and hung on the walls due to a lack of storage facilities. The house had a broken tiled roof, and there were visible water-leak marks on the walls. The environment looked damp and poorly ventilated.

At the time of the interview, the client appeared physically tired and exhausted after returning from the construction site. His body language showed fatigue; he was sitting in a slightly bent posture and frequently rubbing his hands and legs due to body pain. His palms were rough and had visible cracks, likely from prolonged exposure to cement and manual labour. His nails had cement stains, and there were minor cuts on his fingers.

Despite returning tired from work, he shared that on that particular day, it was his turn to cook for all 7 members staying in the room. Among them, cooking duties are rotated daily, and each person is responsible for preparing food for everyone on their assigned day. He mentioned that even if he feels unwell or extremely tired, he cannot avoid this responsibility because it is part of their mutual arrangement.

In addition to cooking, He also had to fetch water from a nearby public tap. There was no piped water connection in the house. He and his co-workers carry buckets of water from the roadside tap for bathing, washing clothes, and cooking purposes. The trainee noticed several plastic containers and buckets stored in a corner of the room.

During the interview, his wife called him on the phone. He answered the call in a low voice and stepped slightly aside. From the conversation, it was understood that she was asking him to send money urgently. She had borrowed money from someone in the village and needed to repay it. She also required money for their daughter's tuition fees. After the call ended, he appeared visibly worried and remained silent for a few moments. He seemed emotionally disturbed. He mentioned softly that managing money has become very difficult due to irregular wages.

The researcher also observed that he was wearing worn-out and slightly torn clothes. His shirt had faded colour, and his trousers had small cement stains. His slippers were extremely thin and worn out from regular use. When asked about it casually, he said that he avoids spending money on himself and prefers to save whatever little he earns for his family. He stated that buying new clothes or footwear for himself feels unnecessary when his family has needs back home.

Further observation showed that he did not possess any protective gear, such as gloves or safety shoes. Emotionally, he appeared stressed but composed. He did not openly complain, yet there was a sense of helplessness in his tone. When speaking about wage theft and injuries, his voice became slower. He frequently used phrases like "*What to do?*" and "*We have to manage*".

The researcher also observed that although the living conditions were difficult, there was a sense of bonding among the co-workers. They addressed each other in a friendly manner and shared small jokes while cooking. This peer connection appeared to provide some emotional comfort to him

The researcher observed that his physical exhaustion, financial stress, poor living conditions, and emotional burden were clearly visible. His life reflects continuous struggle, sacrifice, and adjustment in order to support his family back in his native place.

CASE D

Case D is a 22-year-old migrant worker from Malda district in West Bengal. At present, he lives near Sreekariyam in Thiruvananthapuram along with other migrant workers. His family members, his father, mother, younger brother, and two sisters are staying in their native village in West Bengal. He comes from a family that mainly depends on small-scale farming for its livelihood. The income from farming is irregular and often not enough to meet the family's daily needs. Because of this, he had to take the responsibility of earning for the family at a young age.

He studied up to the first year of graduation. Due to personal and financial reasons, he had to discontinue his studies. The family was finding it difficult to manage the expenses of his education along with other household needs. After dropping out of college, he decided to look for work to support his family. Like many young men from his village, he migrated to different cities in search of employment. Initially, he worked in places like Delhi and Chennai as a construction labourer. These cities offered him work opportunities, but wages were often very low and working conditions were difficult.

In construction, he performs several physically demanding tasks. His work includes mixing cement, preparing concrete, carrying bricks, loading and unloading materials, and assisting masons during construction work. These tasks require a lot of physical strength and endurance. The work is usually done under the hot sun, in dusty environments, and sometimes in unsafe conditions. Despite the hardship, he continues to work because his family depends heavily on the money he earns.

Back in his village, his parents rely on farming income, but agricultural earnings are uncertain. Crop yields often depend on weather conditions and market prices, which are not always favourable. As a result, his income plays a major role in supporting the family. The money he sends home is used for daily household expenses, food, medical needs, and sometimes for his siblings' education. Therefore, he feels a strong sense of responsibility toward his family.

While working in other states, he received very low wages for his labour. During that time, he heard from his uncle about better work opportunities and comparatively higher wages in Kerala. Many migrant workers from West Bengal had already moved to Kerala due to demand for labour in the construction sector. After hearing about this, he decided to migrate to Kerala in the hope of earning more and improving his family's living conditions. He arrived in Kerala in 2024, and it has now been about two years since he started working here.

Currently, he works as a daily wage labourer at a construction site. His working hours usually start from 8:00 in the morning and continue until 5:00 in the evening. The workday is long and physically tiring. Most days, he spends several hours lifting heavy materials, assisting skilled workers, and performing manual labour. Even though the work is hard, he continues to work consistently because he believes that earning money through honest labour will help him support his family.

His daily wage is decided by the contractor who supervises the workers at the construction site. The payment rate is set by the contractor, and he currently receives ₹1100 per day. Although this wage is comparatively higher than what he earned in other states, the payment system is often irregular and uncertain. He explained that he is currently experiencing the issue of wage theft. Because of this problem, he came to the Loyola Migrant Cell to seek help and report the issue.

According to him, he has been working continuously at a building construction site, but he has not received his wages for the past five days. Even though he has completed the assigned work, the contractor has delayed the payment without giving any valid reason. Since he doesn't know how to communicate in Malayalam, it is difficult for him to talk to the contractor. He seeks his cousin brother's help to communicate with the contractor as the cousin brother knows little Malayalam. Whenever he asks about his wages, the contractor gives different excuses. Sometimes the contractor says that he has not worked properly, sometimes he claims that the work has not been completed, and at other times he even accuses him of stealing materials from the site. He feels that these accusations are false and are used as excuses to avoid paying the wages that he has rightfully earned.

He shared his frustration and difficulties as he explained the situation, *"This delay in wages and underpayment creates many issues. We can't pay our rent, afford food, and can't send money back home."* For migrant workers like him, wages are the only source of survival. When wages are delayed or unpaid, it directly affects their ability to meet even basic needs.

The impact of wage theft is not limited to him alone, it also affects his family in the village. Since his family depends on the money he sends regularly, the delay in payment creates difficulties for them as well. When he is unable to send money home, his family has to find other ways to manage their daily expenses. Sometimes they have to borrow money from neighbours or relatives in order to buy food, pay for medicines, or meet other essential needs. This creates additional financial pressure on the family.

While describing his situation, he expressed his disappointment with the reality of migrant life, *“We came here to earn better, hoping we can build better lives for our family. But see, here we have to plead to people to give us the money we have worked for.”* These words reflect the emotional struggle that migrant workers face when their labour is not respected or properly compensated.

Wage delays and underpayment also increase the likelihood that families fall into debt. When income becomes uncertain, families are forced to borrow money to meet their daily needs. Over time, this borrowing can lead to a cycle of debt that becomes difficult to escape. He is worried that if the situation continues, his family may have to take loans or borrow money frequently, which would further worsen their financial condition.

To address the issue, he approached the Loyola Migrant Cell and explained his situation to the key informant, Br. Peter, who is actively involved in supporting migrant workers. He shared the details of the wage theft and the problems he has been facing due to the contractor’s refusal to pay him. Br. Peter listened to his concerns and assured him that the migrant cell would try to find a solution. This assurance gave him some hope that his problem might be addressed and that he might receive the wages he deserved.

Regarding his living conditions, he stays in a small rented house along with other migrant workers. The house has three rooms, and each room accommodates five workers. Although the house has basic facilities such as electricity and water, the living space is very limited for the number of people staying there. The rooms are congested, and the workers have very little personal space. Despite these difficulties, they somehow manage to live together and support each other.

Life in such crowded conditions can be challenging. After long hours of physically demanding work, the workers return to a cramped living space where rest and privacy are limited. However, most migrant workers accept these living conditions because they want to save as much money as possible to send back home. Comfort and personal happiness often take a back seat when survival and family responsibilities are involved.

The uncertainty in wages has also affected him emotionally. He constantly worries about his future and about how he will support his family. The irregular payment of wages has left him feeling stressed and anxious. He fears that the money he has worked hard to earn might never be paid. This uncertainty creates mental pressure and affects his overall well-being.

He is still very young, and living far away from his family is emotionally difficult for him. He often misses his parents and siblings. Being away from home means he cannot share important moments with his family or directly support them during difficult times. However, whenever he feels homesick, he reminds himself of why he migrated: to earn money and improve his family's living conditions. This thought helps him stay strong and continue working despite the challenges.

At the same time, he mentioned that he receives emotional support from his co-workers. Many of them come from similar backgrounds and face similar struggles as migrant labourers. Living and working together creates a sense of solidarity among them. They share their experiences, help each other in difficult situations, and provide companionship in an unfamiliar place. This support system helps him cope with the stress and loneliness that come with migrant life.

His case highlights the realities faced by many migrant workers in the construction sector. While they migrate with the hope of earning better wages and improving their family's living conditions, they often encounter challenges such as wage theft, delayed payments, poor living conditions, and emotional stress. Despite working hard and contributing significantly to the construction industry, their labour is not always recognised or fairly compensated.

Through his experience, it becomes clear that wage theft is not just a financial issue but also a social and psychological problem that affects the dignity and well-being of migrant workers. Addressing such issues requires proper support systems, awareness, and mechanisms to ensure that workers receive fair wages for their labour. The intervention of support organizations like the Loyola Migrant Cell plays an important role in helping workers like him seek justice and protect their rights.

He continues to hope that his issue will be resolved and that he will receive the wages that he has earned through his hard work. His story shows the determination and resilience of migrant workers who continue to struggle for a better future for themselves and their families.

During the interaction, the researcher observed that Case D appeared tired and physically exhausted, possibly due to the continuous nature of his construction work. His clothes and hands showed clear signs of manual labour, such as cement stains and dust. While speaking about wage theft, he seemed worried and frustrated, especially when he explained that the contractor keeps delaying payment with various excuses. It was also observed that he spoke with concern about his family back in West Bengal, as they depend on the money he regularly sends home. The researcher also noticed that he lives in a very congested rented house along

with several other migrant workers, where space is limited, and living conditions are not very comfortable. Despite these challenges, he appeared smiling, determined to continue working and supporting his family. It was also observed that he receives emotional support from his co-workers, who share similar migration experiences and difficulties in the construction field.

CASE E

Case E is a 24-year-old migrant worker from Malda district in West Bengal. At present, he lives in Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram, with other migrant workers. Like many migrant labourers who come to Kerala in search of work, He stays in a rented accommodation shared with several workers from different parts of his native state. His family members, including his father, mother, younger brother, and sister, live in their native village in West Bengal. His family depends mainly on small-scale farming, but the income from farming is limited and uncertain. Because of these financial difficulties, he had to migrate to other places to earn money and support his family.

He studied up to the ninth standard in school. He discontinued his education at an early stage. After leaving school, he stayed at home for some time without doing any specific work. Later, as he grew older and realized the financial situation of his family, he began to engage in small jobs in his native place. Initially, he worked in farm-related activities and took up daily wage labour whenever work was available. These jobs included helping with agricultural work, assisting farmers during harvest seasons, and performing other forms of manual labour in the village. Although these jobs provided some income, the wages were very low and irregular. It was difficult for him to earn enough money to support his family through such work.

In 2019, he decided to migrate to Kerala in search of better employment opportunities. Like many other migrant workers from West Bengal, he had heard about work opportunities and comparatively higher wages in Kerala. He learned about these opportunities through his cousin, who had already been working in Kerala for some time. His cousin told him that there were many job opportunities in the construction and manual labour sectors and that workers could earn higher wages than in their home state. Encouraged by this information, he decided to migrate to Kerala in the hope of improving his financial situation.

When asked why he chose Kerala as a place to work, he simply replied, *“Good money, good place to stay, and job availability.”*

These factors influenced his decision to migrate. Like many migrant workers, he believed that working in Kerala would help him earn enough money to support his family and gradually improve their living conditions.

After arriving in Kerala, he started working in various manual labour jobs. Over the years, he has worked in several fields, including plumbing work, tile work, furniture-related work, and other forms of construction labour. Since he does not have formal training in any particular trade, he usually works as a helper or assistant under skilled workers such as masons and carpenters. Through experience and observation, he gradually learned some of these skills while working on different worksites.

Currently, he works as a daily-wage labourer at a construction site. His work mainly involves assisting the mason with various construction tasks. His working hours usually begin at 8:00 in the morning and continue until around 7:00 in the evening. The work is physically demanding and requires long hours of standing, lifting materials, and assisting skilled workers in completing construction tasks. Despite the difficulty of the work, he continues to work hard because he knows that his family depends on his income.

The main reason behind his migration is the financial responsibility he carries toward his family. His sister's marriage had created a significant financial burden for the family. Like many families in rural areas, they had to borrow money to conduct the wedding. As the elder son in the family, he felt responsible for repaying this debt. He believes that it is his duty to support his parents and help them clear the borrowed money. Therefore, the money he earns in Kerala is mainly used to repay these debts and support his family's daily needs.

His experience as a migrant worker has not always been smooth. He has faced several challenges during his time in Kerala, one of the most serious of which is wage theft. This experience has had a strong impact on his life and has caused him significant financial and emotional stress.

He shared that he once worked for about two years at a workplace near Sreekariyam under a contractor. The work was related to agriculture at the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI). During this period, his responsibilities included various farm-related tasks such as planting trees, watering plants, helping in harvesting crops, preparing the soil for planting, and applying fertilizers. The work required physical effort and regular attention to the plants and soil. In the beginning, everything seemed normal, and the payments were made regularly. The

contractor used to pay the workers on time and did not face any issues during the early stages of the work.

After some time, the situation started to change. The contractor gradually began delaying the payments. At first, the payments were made weekly, which helped the workers manage their daily expenses. Later, the contractor started withholding the wages for longer periods. Eventually, he stopped paying the workers regularly and even reduced their pay. According to him, the contractor withheld wages for nearly 28 days at one point.

Despite this situation, the workers continued working because they did not want to lose their jobs. For migrant workers, finding a stable job is often difficult, and losing work means losing their only source of income. Therefore, they continued working in the hope that the contractor would eventually settle their outstanding wages.

Over time, the situation became worse. The contractor stopped paying them altogether. By that time, he alone owed around ₹33,000 in unpaid wages. Several other workers were working alongside him and were also facing the same issue. Together, the total unpaid wages of the workers amounted to around ₹1,00,000. The workers repeatedly tried to contact the contractor to ask for their wages, but the contractor ignored their calls and refused to meet with them. Eventually, he stopped coming to the field and stopped working as a contractor at that location.

As a result, the workers not only lost their wages but also lost their jobs. This situation left them in a very difficult position. They had worked for many days expecting to receive payment, but suddenly they were left without both income and employment.

The workers then decided to approach the Sreekariyam Police Station to file a complaint. However, their experience at the police station was disappointing. He recalled that when they tried to explain their problem, the police officers told them, *“You guys first speak in Malayalam, then only we will write a complaint. Your language doesn’t work here.”* Since most of the workers were migrant labourers who did not know Malayalam well, this became a major barrier for them.

Feeling helpless and disappointed, the workers did not know what to do next. At that time, they approached the Loyola Migrant Cell for help and support. The members of the migrant cell listened to their problems and decided to assist them in addressing the issue. With the support of the Loyola Migrant Cell, they again went to the police station to report the case.

While describing the incident, he shared another experience that made him feel upset and frustrated. He said that the contractor later came to the police station carrying a box of laddoos and gave it to the police officers. According to him, the contractor and the police officers then spoke privately for several minutes behind closed doors. This incident created doubt and confusion among the workers about whether their issue would be taken seriously.

The workers had collected some evidence related to their work and payment. They had call recordings and screenshots of payment messages that showed proof of the wages they were supposed to receive. With this evidence and support from the migrant cell, the workers managed to recover some of their money. Even though they were able to recover part of their wages, the contractor still did not pay the full amount he owed them. Some workers eventually gave up and left the matter because they did not want to get involved in further trouble or legal procedures. This delay and denial of wages created many problems in his life. Since he depended entirely on his daily earnings, the loss of such a large sum undermined his financial stability. He found it difficult to manage his daily expenses, pay house rent, and send money back home to support his family.

His parents are getting older and require financial support, including money for their medical needs. In addition, he feels responsible for supporting his younger brother's education. Because of the wage theft, he felt helpless and unable to manage these responsibilities properly. The stress of not receiving his hard-earned wages caused him anxiety and emotional distress.

While discussing his experience, he explained how this incident changed the way he approaches work, *"Now Didi, if I don't receive wages for one day from a worksite, I don't go for work the next day. I try to find other work with the help of my friends, because who would want to lose their hard-earned money?"* This statement reflects the lack of trust that migrant workers often develop after experiencing wage theft.

Despite these challenges, he mentioned that he receives strong emotional support from his family and co-workers. His family understands the difficulties he faces while working far away from home and encourages him to stay strong. Similarly, his co-workers also support him during difficult situations. Since many of them have had similar experiences, they understand each other's struggles and help one another cope with the challenges of migrant life.

His story shows the vulnerability of migrant workers who move to different states in search of better opportunities. While they migrate with hopes of improving their family's living conditions, they often face exploitation, wage theft, and difficulties in accessing justice.

Language barriers, lack of awareness about legal rights, and dependence on contractors make it even harder for them to protect themselves from such exploitation.

At the same time, his experience also shows the importance of support systems such as migrant worker organizations and community networks. The intervention of the Loyola Migrant Cell helped the workers raise their voices and recover at least part of their unpaid wages.

Such support plays an important role in ensuring that migrant workers are not completely left without help when they face exploitation.

Through his experience, he continues to work in the hope of repaying his family's debts and providing a better life for his parents and siblings. Despite the hardships he has faced, he remains determined to continue working and supporting his family. His story reflects the resilience and determination of migrant workers who continue to struggle for dignity, fairness, and a better future. During the interaction with him, the researcher observed that he appeared physically tired, which may be due to the long working hours and the nature of manual labour he performs daily. While narrating his experience of wage theft, he seemed emotionally affected and frustrated.

But he remained calm and kept a smile throughout the conversation. His tone changed when he explained that the contractor had stopped paying the workers and that they struggled to recover their wages. At certain moments, he paused while speaking, which indicated the stress and disappointment he experienced during that period.

The researcher also observed that he spoke with a sense of responsibility when he mentioned his family. As the elder son, he feels responsible for repaying the debts incurred for his sister's marriage and supporting his parents and younger brother. This responsibility seems to motivate him to continue working despite the challenges he faces as a migrant worker.

It was also noted that he currently lives with other migrant workers in a shared accommodation in Sreekariyam. The living space appeared crowded, with several workers sharing the same room. Although basic facilities such as water and electricity were available, the space was limited and not very comfortable. However, the workers seemed to adjust to these conditions as they prioritise saving money to send back home.

Another observation was that he relies strongly on the support of his co-workers and friends. During the conversation, he mentioned that his friends often help him find new work sites when

problems arise with contractors. This support network appears to play an important role in helping him cope with the uncertainties of migrant labour.

CASE F

Case F is a 30-year-old migrant worker from Assam. At present, he lives in Sreekariyam in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala. He currently stays alone inside the Loyola School campus, where he works as a gardener. Like many other migrant workers, he moved to Kerala in search of better employment opportunities and a stable income to support his family back home.

He belongs to a small rural family in Assam. His family consists of his father, mother, wife and his three-year-old son. His family mainly depends on livestock for their livelihood. They rear animals and manage small-scale agricultural activities to survive. The income generated from livestock and small agricultural work is very limited and uncertain. As a result, the family struggled financially for many years.

He is the youngest son in the family. As the youngest, he feels a strong responsibility to care for his parents and support the family financially. His parents are old and require regular medication and medical care. His wife stays at home and takes care of their child and household responsibilities. Therefore, the financial burden of the entire family falls on him.

He did not receive any formal education. He has never attended school. Due to poverty and family circumstances, education was inaccessible to him during his childhood. From a young age, he had to help his family with livestock and other manual work in the village. Because of this, he only knows how to write his name and read or write a few simple words. His lack of education limits his employment opportunities and makes him dependent on manual labour for earning a living.

As financial difficulties increased, he decided to migrate to Kerala in search of work. Migration was not an easy decision for him. It meant leaving his family behind and moving to an unfamiliar place where he did not know the language or people. However, due to family debts and bank loans, he felt he had no other option.

The debts in his family accumulated mainly because of medical expenses and household needs. His parent's medical treatments required money, and sometimes the family had to borrow

money from banks or local lenders. These financial pressures pushed him to leave his home and migrate in search of work.

It has been three years since he came to Kerala. Over the past three years, he has worked in various roles as a gardener and manual labourer. Currently, he works as a gardener at Loyola School. His job involves maintaining the school garden and caring for plants.

His workday starts around 7 in the morning and runs until 5 in the evening. His responsibilities include watering plants, cutting and trimming trees and bushes, cleaning the garden area, planting new plants and adding fertilizers to maintain their growth. Gardening requires physical effort and patience, especially in the hot sun and humid weather.

The wage for his work is decided by the school management. At present, he receives his salary at the end of every month. According to him, his current workplace does not have any wage-theft issues. He receives his payment regularly, which provides him with some financial stability compared to his previous job.

However, he has experienced wage theft in the past. Before joining Loyola School, he worked as a gardener at the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) through a contractor. At that time, he worked for several days expecting to receive wages for his labour.

Unfortunately, after working for some time, the contractor failed to pay the promised wages. He and other workers repeatedly asked for their payment, but the contractor kept delaying it. Later, the contractor completely denied giving the money. According to him, the payment became irregular and uncertain, and the contractor finally stopped work on the site without paying the workers.

This incident left him and many other workers in a very difficult situation. They had already spent time and energy working, but received nothing in return. For migrant workers who depend on daily or weekly wages to survive, such incidents cause severe financial hardship.

Some of his coworkers were willing to protest and fight for their wages. They even decided to go to the police station to file a complaint against the contractor. But he did not want to involve himself in the conflict. He felt afraid and powerless in that situation.

While speaking about this incident, he shared his feelings and concerns.

“The contractor is a powerful man. He is very young and crooked. This is his place after all. What can we do here? How long will we fight? He has connections even in the police. Maybe

he might give the money, but what if we get beaten up? We have no voice here. Even the police don't listen to us."

These words reflect the fear and helplessness experienced by migrant workers when they face exploitation. Being outsiders in the state, many migrant workers feel they do not have the power or support to fight against injustice.

He believed that complaining to the police might create more problems for him. He worried that the contractor could harm him or cause trouble. Because of this fear, he decided to forget the money the contractor owed him. Even though the amount was earned through hard work, he felt that continuing the fight would be risky.

After leaving that job, he started searching for another opportunity. Eventually, he found work as a gardener at Loyola School. This job provided him with some stability and a regular monthly salary, which was important for supporting his family.

During the period when he did not receive wages from the contractor, he faced serious financial stress. The money he usually sends to his family in Assam stopped for a while. His family members became worried because they depend on his income to meet their daily needs.

He explained that his family often called him during that time, asking about the delay in sending money. However, he did not want to tell them about the wage theft situation. He felt that sharing the truth would only increase their anxiety and stress.

He said that the money he earns might appear small to others, but it is the result of hard physical labour. For migrant workers like him, every rupee matters because it supports their family members who depend on them.

To manage the situation, he borrowed money from friends among migrant workers. With the borrowed money, he was able to send some money to his family so they could cover their basic expenses. This shows the informal support system among migrant workers, in which they help each other during times of crisis.

He also shared his emotional struggles as a migrant worker. One of the most painful experiences for him is living away from his family for a long period. He has a three-year-old son, but he has not seen him in person since the child was born.

He expressed deep sadness while talking about this. *"Due to debts, I promised myself that I will not return home until I earn enough money to clear all the debts. My son is three years old*

now, but I have never seen him since he was born. I only see him through video calls. It is very difficult for me to stay away because I am a father and I miss my child. This money problem is driving me crazy. I cannot go home until I repay all the debts.”

These words reveal the emotional burden that migration creates for workers like him. The responsibility of earning money for the family forces them to sacrifice personal happiness and family relationships.

Another reason why he hesitates to visit his home is the fear of losing his current job. Since he lives alone and depends entirely on his income from this job, he worries that taking a long leave might cost him the opportunity. Finding a new job again could be difficult for him.

Because of this fear, he continues to stay in Kerala and work continuously without visiting his family. Occasionally, in addition to his regular job at the school, he also does small gardening work in nearby houses to earn extra money. This additional work helps him send more money home and slowly repay the debts.

The experience of wage theft, financial pressure, family responsibilities and separation from loved ones has deeply affected his life. Although his current job provides him with some stability, the memories of past exploitation and the burden of debts continue to influence his decisions.

Despite these challenges, he remains hopeful. His biggest wish is to clear the debts and finally return home to meet his family. He hopes that one day he will be able to see his son in person, spend time with his parents and live peacefully without financial stress.

His story shows the realities faced by many migrant workers in India. Issues such as wage theft, job insecurity, lack of legal awareness, fear of authorities, and emotional struggles due to family separation are common experiences among migrant labourers.

During the interaction, he appeared calm and soft-spoken. He spoke slowly and carefully while sharing his experiences. He was smiling and pretending that he was fine, there were no worries in his life. Upon asking, he replied *“Let my sorrows stay with me. I don’t want to share them with others because they might feel sad or sorry for me”* At some moments, especially when he talked about his family and his son, he appeared emotional, and his voice became low. It was visible that staying away from his family for such a long time had deeply affected him emotionally.

The researcher observed that he lives alone inside the Loyola School campus in a small space provided for workers. Even if we fall sick, nobody is there to help us. His living condition seemed simple with only basic facilities. Since he lives alone, he has to manage all his daily activities, such as cooking, washing clothes, and maintaining his room, after his long working hours. Despite working from morning till evening, he sometimes takes up additional gardening work in nearby houses to earn extra income.

He remained committed to his responsibilities towards his family. While discussing the wage theft incident at his previous workplace, he seemed frustrated and helpless. His fear of confronting the contractor and approaching the police reflects the vulnerability experienced by many migrant workers. Being in an unfamiliar state, lacking education and support systems, migrant workers often feel powerless to fight against exploitation.

Another important observation was his deep emotional struggle related to migration. Even though his son is three years old, he has never been able to see him in person. The researcher sensed the sadness and longing in his words when he spoke about his child and family. His decision to stay away from home until he clears all his debts reflects the economic pressure migrant workers face. His situation reflects the difficult realities faced by migrant workers, such as job insecurity, financial pressure, family separation and vulnerability to exploitation like wage theft. Despite these hardships, he continues to work with hope and determination to improve the living conditions of his family

CHAPTER - V

THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The thematic analysis of the six case descriptions was conducted to identify recurring patterns and shared experiences among migrant workers. By carefully examining the narratives, common issues, challenges, and coping mechanisms were identified and organized into broader themes. These themes reflect not only the individual experiences of the workers but also the structural and socio-economic conditions that shape their lives and work environments.

The analysis reveals that migrant workers face multiple forms of vulnerability, including economic insecurity, lack of labour protection, difficult living and working conditions, and emotional stress arising from migration and family responsibilities. At the same time, the cases highlight the resilience and determination of workers who continue to endure hardships in pursuit of better opportunities for themselves and their families. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the case descriptions and provide a deeper understanding of the realities migrant workers face.

5.2 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Theme-1 Economic Insecurity and Wage Exploitation

A major theme that emerged across all five cases was the economic insecurity experienced by migrant workers due to unstable employment conditions, irregular wage payments, and various forms of wage exploitation. The findings reveal that most migrant workers in the unorganized sector survive on daily wage-based employment, where income is neither fixed nor guaranteed. Unlike workers in the formal sector, they often lack written employment contracts, job security, and institutional mechanisms to ensure timely and fair payment. Their dependence on temporary work makes them highly vulnerable to sudden unemployment, reduced working days, and exploitation by employers or contractors.

Wage theft emerged as a significant concern among the respondents. Many workers reported experiencing delayed payments, partial wage payments, or uncertainty about the amount they would receive after completing their work. Since their livelihoods are directly dependent on daily earnings, even a short delay in receiving wages creates severe financial stress. The inability to access their earned income immediately affects their capacity to meet basic needs such as food, accommodation, rent, healthcare expenses, transportation costs, and their family

members' educational needs. For migrant workers who often support families in their home states, wage delays also create additional pressure as they struggle to send money through remittances.

The study also highlights how economic insecurity extends beyond income instability and influences various aspects of workers' lives. Continuous uncertainty about employment and wages creates feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and dependency on employers. Many workers accept poor working conditions, excessive working hours, and unfair treatment because losing the job could threaten their immediate survival. This reflects the unequal power relationship between employers and migrant labourers, where workers have limited bargaining power due to their vulnerable social and economic position.

Furthermore, the absence of strong labour protections and the ineffective implementation of welfare measures increase their vulnerability. Many migrant workers are unaware of their legal rights, minimum wage provisions, and available social security schemes, making it difficult for them to challenge exploitation. Their temporary migration status, language barriers, and lack of local support networks further restrict their ability to seek justice or negotiate better working conditions.

Theme-2 Informal Employment and Lack of Labour Protection

Another significant theme emerging from the cases is the informal nature of employment among migrant workers in the unorganized sector. Most workers are engaged through verbal agreements with employers or contractors, without written contracts, fixed working conditions, or assurance of continued employment. This informal arrangement reduces their bargaining power and makes them highly dependent on employers for their livelihood.

Due to the lack of formal employment documentation, workers face difficulties in claiming unpaid wages, reporting workplace exploitation, or seeking compensation for accidents and injuries. Many are unaware of labour laws, welfare schemes, and their legal entitlements, which further limits their ability to protect their rights. The absence of social security benefits such as health support, insurance, and income protection increases their vulnerability and places them at greater economic risk.

These findings demonstrate how informality creates conditions where migrant workers remain excluded from essential labour protections, allowing exploitation and insecurity to continue within the workplace.

Theme- 3 Migrant Worker Vulnerability and Structural Disadvantage

Migration places workers at increased vulnerability due to limited social, economic, and institutional support in the destination area. As outsiders in a different state, many migrant workers face challenges such as language barriers, unfamiliarity with local systems, and difficulties in accessing government services and welfare schemes. These factors often restrict their ability to seek assistance or assert their rights.

Many workers hesitate to question employers or report unfair treatment for fear of losing their jobs, facing further exploitation, or not being understood due to communication barriers. Their dependence on employers for income and survival creates an unequal power relationship in which they have limited ability to negotiate wages or working conditions. Compared to local workers, migrant labourers often experience greater insecurity due to their weak social networks and lack of awareness about available support systems.

Thus, migrant workers' vulnerability is not only related to their economic condition but is also shaped by broader structural inequalities, social exclusion, and limited access to institutional protection. These conditions reinforce their marginal position within the labour market and increase their risk of exploitation.

Theme- 4 Challenging Living and Working Conditions

Another important theme identified in the study is the difficult living and working conditions migrant workers experience. Most workers are engaged in physically demanding occupations that require long working hours and intense manual effort. In many cases, they work without adequate safety measures, protective equipment, or proper rest facilities, increasing their risk of workplace injuries, exhaustion, and health problems.

The study also highlights the poor housing conditions faced by migrant workers. Many workers live in overcrowded and inadequate accommodations, often sharing small rooms with several others due to financial limitations. These living spaces may lack proper sanitation, ventilation, and basic facilities, affecting their comfort and overall well-being.

The combination of unsafe workplaces and poor living conditions contributes to the continued vulnerability of migrant workers. Their limited income and insecure employment often force them to compromise on basic needs, demonstrating how economic constraints influence both their occupational safety and quality of life.

Theme- 5 Family Responsibility and Migration as a Survival Strategy

Migration among workers is not merely a personal choice but is often a strategy adopted to fulfil family responsibilities and ensure economic survival. Many migrant workers move away from their native places due to limited employment opportunities, poverty, and the need to secure a stable income for their families. Their migration decisions are strongly influenced by household needs, such as supporting parents, spouses, children, and siblings, repaying debts, arranging children's education, and improving overall living conditions. For many workers, migration represents a means of achieving financial stability and providing better opportunities for their families.

However, being the primary earners places a heavy emotional and economic burden on migrant workers. Their responsibility towards family members often forces them to continue working even when they experience wage delays, exploitation, unsafe working environments, poor living conditions, or health problems. The fear of losing income and failing to meet family expectations limits their ability to resist unfair treatment or demand better working conditions. Thus, migration functions both as a survival strategy and as a source of vulnerability, as workers sacrifice their own well-being to secure their families' livelihoods.

Theme- 6 Emotional Stress and Resilience

The experiences of migrant workers are not limited to economic difficulties but also involve significant emotional and psychological challenges. Wage exploitation, uncertain employment, separation from family members, and constant financial pressure often create feelings of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and helplessness among workers. Living away from their families for extended periods can result in emotional struggles, as they miss important family events, social support systems, and personal relationships. The uncertainty regarding income and the inability to provide consistent financial support further increase their psychological burden.

Despite these hardships, migrant workers also demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. The cases reveal that workers develop coping strategies to manage difficult situations, such as adjusting to unfamiliar environments, accepting challenging work conditions, and maintaining hope for a better future. Their willingness to continue working despite exploitation and hardship reflects their determination to improve their families' living standards and secure better opportunities for their children. This resilience is largely driven by their sense of responsibility, aspirations, and commitment towards their families. Thus, migrant workers' experiences represent a complex combination of vulnerability and strength, where

they endure significant struggles while continuously striving for economic and social improvement.

CHAPTER -VI

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the major findings and suggestions derived from the present study on the experiences of migrant workers affected by wage theft and labour exploitation in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. The findings are based on the analysis of six case studies that explored the socio-economic conditions, employment experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of migrant workers in the unorganized sector. The chapter highlights the key themes that emerged from the data, including wage insecurity, labour exploitation, unsafe working conditions, poor living arrangements, migration-related struggles, psychological stress, and resilience among migrant workers.

The findings provide insight into how structural inequalities and the informal nature of employment contribute to migrant workers' vulnerability. They reveal the difficulties workers face in accessing their rights, seeking justice, and securing stable livelihoods. At the same time, the study also recognizes the agency, determination, and resilience demonstrated by migrant workers while navigating challenging circumstances.

Based on these findings, the chapter further presents suggestions to improve the working and living conditions of migrant workers. The recommendations focus on strengthening labour protection mechanisms, ensuring timely wage payments, improving access to legal and welfare services, promoting workplace safety, enhancing social inclusion, and providing psychosocial and financial support. These suggestions are intended to contribute towards creating a more secure, fair, and supportive environment for migrant workers in the unorganized sector.

6.2 FINDINGS

The study explored the experiences of migrant workers who were affected by wage theft and labour exploitation in the Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. The analysis of six case studies revealed several significant findings regarding the socio-economic, occupational, and psychological realities of migrant workers.

A major finding of the study is that wage theft and delayed payment of wages remain widespread forms of labour exploitation among migrant workers. Most respondents reported unpaid wages, delayed payments, arbitrary deductions, or the complete denial of wages by

contractors and employers. Since migrant workers largely depend on daily wages for their survival, any disruption in payment directly affects their ability to meet basic needs such as food, rent, healthcare, and family expenses.

The study further revealed that migrant workers are predominantly employed in the informal sector, where employment arrangements are largely verbal and lack written contracts. The absence of formal agreements makes it difficult for workers to claim unpaid wages or seek legal remedies when exploitation occurs. This informality contributes significantly to their vulnerability and job insecurity.

Another important finding is the structural disadvantages migrant workers face due to their status as outsiders. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with local systems, and fear of discrimination prevent many workers from approaching authorities or asserting their rights. Several respondents expressed hesitation in reporting wage theft because they feared losing their jobs or facing retaliation from employers.

The study also found that migrant workers are exposed to unsafe and demanding working conditions. Construction workers reported working without adequate safety equipment and frequently performing hazardous tasks. Workplace injuries were common, yet none of the respondents reported receiving compensation, insurance coverage, or employer support following accidents.

Poor living conditions emerged as another major concern. Many respondents lived in overcrowded rented accommodations with limited space and inadequate facilities. Such living arrangements affected their physical comfort, privacy, and overall quality of life. The need to minimize living expenses often compelled workers to tolerate substandard housing conditions.

Migration was found to be primarily driven by economic necessity and family responsibilities. The respondents migrated to support their families, repay debts, provide education for children and siblings, manage healthcare expenses, and improve household living conditions. Their role as primary breadwinners often compelled them to continue working despite exploitation, illness, or unsafe conditions.

The study further identified significant psychological impacts associated with migration and wage exploitation. Feelings of stress, anxiety, helplessness, frustration, loneliness, and insecurity were evident across the cases. Prolonged separation from family members and

uncertainty regarding employment and wages contributed to emotional distress among the respondents.

Despite these challenges, the study highlights the resilience and determination of migrant workers. Their commitment to supporting their families, aspirations for a better future, and ability to endure difficult circumstances demonstrate remarkable strength and perseverance. Informal support networks among co-workers and assistance from organizations such as the Loyola Migrant Cell played a crucial role in helping workers cope with adversity.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS

Awareness on Loyola Jeevika Migrant Cell: Many migrant workers are unaware of the support services available to them. Awareness programmes should be conducted to inform workers about the services provided by the Loyola Jeevika Migrant Cell, including assistance with wage disputes, legal support, counselling, and documentation.

Registration and Documentation of Employment: Many participants were employed through informal arrangements and lacked proof of employment. Workers should be encouraged to maintain records of their employment, including employer details, wage agreements, attendance records, and payment receipts. Local labour departments and migrant support organisations can assist workers in documenting their employment to strengthen their claims in wage disputes.

Formation of Migrant Worker Support Groups: The study found that workers often faced exploitation in isolation. Creating local migrant worker groups or collectives can provide a platform for sharing information, reporting abuses, and collectively negotiating with employers. Such groups can also provide emotional and social support during periods of crisis.

Immediate Assistance During Wage Disputes: Wage theft often leaves workers unable to meet basic needs such as food, rent, and healthcare. Temporary emergency assistance, including food support, shelter assistance, or short-term financial aid, should be made available to workers whose wages have been withheld.

Improvement of Living Conditions in Labour Camps: The study found that several workers lived in overcrowded, unhygienic accommodations. Employers and contractors should ensure

access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, adequate ventilation, and secure housing to improve workers' health and well-being.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The study examined the experiences of migrant workers affected by wage theft and labour exploitation and explored the broader social, economic, and psychological dimensions of their lives. The findings demonstrate that wage theft is not merely a financial issue but a multidimensional problem that affects workers' livelihoods, family relationships, mental well-being, and sense of dignity.

The study revealed that migrant workers continue to face numerous challenges, including irregular employment, lack of labour protection, unsafe working conditions, poor housing, language barriers, and limited access to justice. Their dependence on contractors, the absence of written contracts, and a lack of awareness of labour rights increase their vulnerability to exploitation.

At the same time, the study highlights the remarkable resilience of migrant workers who continue to endure difficult circumstances in order to support their families and secure a better future. Their experiences reflect both the hardships and the sacrifices associated with migration. The support provided by co-workers, informal networks, and migrant welfare organizations demonstrates the importance of collective assistance in addressing the challenges faced by migrant labourers.

The study concludes that protecting migrant workers requires comprehensive interventions at the policy, institutional, and community levels. Strengthening labour law enforcement, improving access to welfare services, ensuring fair wages, promoting occupational safety, and enhancing awareness of rights are essential steps toward safeguarding migrant workers from exploitation. Recognizing their contribution to economic development and protecting their rights is fundamental to building a more inclusive, equitable, and socially just society.

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ANNEXURES:

INTERVIEW GUIDE:

TITLE: SURVIVING PRECARIETY: A STUDY ON WAGE THEFT AND ALIENATION AMONG MIGRANT LABOURERS IN THE UNORGANIZED SECTOR

General Research Question

What is the nature of wage theft experienced by migrant workers in Thiruvananthapuram, and how does it shape their lived social, economic, and psychological experiences?

Specific Research Questions

- What forms of wage theft are commonly experienced by migrant workers in Thiruvananthapuram?
- What are the key factors contributing to wage theft among these workers (e.g., employer practices, legal gaps, lack of documentation)?
- How do migrant workers perceive and respond to incidents of wage theft?
- What social, economic, and psychological impacts does wage theft have on the lives of migrant workers?
- What coping mechanisms or support systems (formal or informal) are available to affected workers?
- How effective are existing labour laws and enforcement mechanisms in addressing wage theft among migrant workers?

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

A. Personal and Work Profile

What is your name?

What is your gender?

Where is your native place?

Where is your current place of residence?

Marital status?

Number of family members?

Highest level of education you have completed?

Please tell me about the work you currently do.

Who are the members of your family who depend on your income?

Where does your family currently stay?

What responsibilities do you have towards your family?

What made you choose this work and location?

How long have you been working in this job?

What are your usual working hours and tasks?

B. Socio-Economic Conditions

How is your wage amount decided?

What was promised to you regarding wages at the time of employment?

How and when are wages actually paid?

Have you experienced wage delays, partial payments, or non-payment?

Can you describe any deductions or unpaid work you have faced?

What reasons are given for delayed or unpaid wages?

How do wage problems affect your daily life and family needs?

What happens when you ask for your pending wages?

Do unpaid wages make it difficult for you to leave or change jobs?

How secure do you feel in continuing this work?

C. Living Conditions

How was your accommodation arranged?

What basic facilities are available at your place of stay (drinking water and sanitation, electricity, housing structure, cooking facilities, waste management)

What difficulties do you face in your living conditions?

D. Legal Awareness and Institutional Support

What do you know about your rights related to wages and work?

Are you aware of any welfare schemes for workers?

Have you ever sought help for wage or work-related problems?

What stops workers from approaching authorities or organisations?

What kind of support do you feel is most needed?

E. Psychological Wellbeing

How do your work and wage conditions affect your mental wellbeing?

What situations at work cause stress or anxiety?

How does wage uncertainty affect your emotional state?

How does being away from family affect you?

What worries do you have about the future?

F. Coping and Support Systems

What do you usually do when you face problems at work?

Who do you turn to for help or advice?

How do co-workers support each other during wage issues?

What helps you continue working despite difficulties?

G. Aspirations and Recommendations

What changes would you like in wage payment and work conditions?

What would make your work feel fair and secure?

What suggestions would you give to improve the situation of workers like you?

Observation Checklist

Housing Conditions

- Type of housing (temporary/permanent/contractor-provided)
- Condition of walls, roof, and flooring
- Availability of electricity and lighting
- Access to safe drinking water
- Separate space for cooking and sleeping
- Privacy, especially for women
- Exposure to heat, rain, or flooding
- Waste disposal practices around the house

Workplace Conditions

- Availability and use of safety equipment (gloves, helmets, masks)
- Working hours and the presence of overtime
- Breaks during work (rest, food, water)

- Nature of supervision (supportive/strict/exploitative)
- Job security or daily-wage uncertainty
- Presence of child labour or elderly workers
- Mechanism to report problems or injuries
- Provision of identity cards or employment records

Social Conditions

- Support systems among workers (sharing food, help during illness)
- Relationship with contractors or employers
- Inclusion/exclusion by local community
- Language or cultural barriers
- Ability to participate in local events or festivals
- Presence of discrimination or harassment
- Contact with family members back home

Health & Hygiene Practices

- Access to toilets at workplace
- Handwashing practices and availability of soap
- Food storage and cooking hygiene
- Use of protective gear for health safety
- Access to healthcare facilities or first aid
- Awareness of occupational health risks

Signs of Stress or Exhaustion

- Physical signs (fatigue, injuries, weight loss)
- Emotional signs (irritability, sadness, withdrawal)
- Sleep problems or irregular sleep patterns
- Fear of job loss or wage cuts
- Expression of homesickness or loneliness
- Lack of motivation or hopelessness

Case Study Format

1. Background Information

Age, gender, marital status, education level

Place of origin (village/town, district, state)

Family structure (nuclear/joint, dependents)

Socio-economic background before migration

2. Migration History

Reasons for migration (push and pull factors)

Type of migration (seasonal/permanent/circular)

Decision-making process (self, family, contractor, peer influence)

Migration route and journey experiences

Duration of stay at the current place

Previous migration experiences

3. Work and Wage Details

Nature of work and sector (construction, domestic work, factory, etc.)

Working hours, workload, and division of labor

Wage structure (daily/monthly, cash/bank)

Wage determination and payment regularity

Availability of job security and written contracts

Occupational risks and workplace safety conditions

Gender-based division of work and wage disparities (if applicable)

4. Living Conditions

Housing type and ownership (rented/shared/employer-provided)

Basic amenities: water, sanitation, electricity, ventilation

Overcrowding and privacy issues

Food access and nutrition

Impact of living conditions on health and wellbeing

5. Problems Faced

a. Economic Issues

Wage delay, wage theft, underpayment

Irregular employment and income insecurity

Debt, loans, and remittances

Lack of access to social security schemes

b. Psychological and Emotional Issues

Stress, anxiety, fear of job loss

Loneliness, homesickness, social isolation

Experiences of discrimination or humiliation

Impact on self-esteem and identity

c. Legal and Structural Issues

Lack of identity documents at the destination

Limited awareness of labor rights and entitlements

Exploitation by contractors/employers

Barriers in accessing grievance redressal mechanisms

6. Health and Wellbeing

Common physical health issues (injuries, chronic illness)

Access to healthcare facilities and insurance

Workplace-related health risks

Mental health concerns and help-seeking behavior

Impact of migration on overall wellbeing

7. Support Systems

Family support (emotional, financial)

Peer networks and co-workers

Role of community groups, unions, NGOs

Support from employers or local authorities

Informal support systems at the destination

8. Coping Strategies

Individual coping mechanisms (emotional regulation, faith, routines)

Collective coping (peer solidarity, sharing resources)

Financial coping strategies (saving, borrowing, multiple jobs)

Health-related coping (self-medication, home remedies)

Use of technology (mobile phones, social media) to stay connected

to share about your experiences as a migrant worker?