

Job satisfaction level among the tea garden workers in Biswanath district of Assam, India

ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the socio-economic conditions and the current satisfaction levels of the tea garden workers working at Biswanath district of Assam. This study employs a descriptive research design to evaluate the satisfaction levels among tea garden workers. The research focuses on seven distinct aspects of job satisfaction: Wage and Salary Amount, Wage Regularity, Working Hours, Working Conditions, Work Safety, Training Facilities, and Superior's Behavior.

The study was conducted in Biswanath District, Assam, India, during the 2023-2024 period. A total of 138 respondents, confirmed to work in tea gardens or factories, were surveyed using a semi-structured schedule. Satisfaction levels were quantified with predetermined 5 point scale and analyzed using frequency and percentage tables.

The socio-economic profile revealed a diverse age range and a notable gender disparity among respondents, with males outnumbering females across all age groups. The analysis highlighted significant dissatisfaction with wages, with nearly half of the respondents expressing discontent. Wage regularity also emerged as a concern, though most respondents maintained a neutral or slightly positive perspective. Working hours showed mixed satisfaction levels, while working conditions and work safety indicated predominant dissatisfaction. Training facilities received a balanced yet slightly positive response, whereas superior's behavior was viewed neutrally to negatively.

The study identifies critical areas for improvement in working conditions at tea gardens and factories of Biswanath district. High levels of dissatisfaction regarding wages, work safety, and superior behavior underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions. Enhancing wage structures, ensuring regular payments, improving working conditions and safety measures, and fostering positive relationships between laborers and superiors are essential steps.

Keywords: Tea garden, workers, satisfaction, labors

1. INTRODUCTION

Tea, coffee, and cocoa are the largest three non-alcoholic drinks in the world[1]. Tea has a rich history that spans centuries and is deeply rooted in various cultures. Made from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, tea comes in different types and flavours, offering a wide range of tastes and aromas to suit different preferences. The global tea market value was approximately 200 billion U.S. dollars (USD) in 2020 and is predicted to increase over 318 billion USD by the year 2025. The worldwide production of tea was nearly 5.8 million metric tonnes in 2018 and the export quantity was around 1.8 million metric tonnes in that year. The top tea producing countries in the world are China, India, Kenya, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, among which China holds the top position followed by India and Kenya [2]. China shares around 40% of the total tea production whereas India contributes about 23%.

India is one of the top tea-consuming countries in the world, with domestic consumers accounting for 80% of the country's tea production. The northern part of India is the biggest tea producer, accounting for approximately 83% of India's annual tea production in 2022, with major contributions from Assam and West Bengal. The remaining 17% of India's tea is produced in the southern region, with Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka being the top producers [3]. Overall, 1,365 million kg of tea was produced in India in FY 2022-23. With 10% of global exports, India is one of the world's top 5 tea exporting countries [3]. In FY 2021-22, tea exports from India were valued at US\$ 750.63 million. Black tea is the most popular variety exported from India. Other export varieties include regular tea, green tea, herbal tea, masala tea and lemon tea.

India being the world's second-largest tea producer holds a strong position in the global export market. Russia, Iran, the UAE, the US, the UK, Germany, and China are some of the top countries that import tea from India. India exported US\$ 61.48 million worth tea to these countries in the first quarter of FY 2022-23. India contributes 23 per cent to the global tea output and employs around 1.2 million workers in the tea plantation sector [4].

Tea cultivation in Assam is more than just agribusiness. It is a source of livelihood for a huge number of people. There are more than 800 tea gardens listed with Directorate of Tea Tribes and Adivasi welfare, Government of Assam and numerous are unlisted. These tea gardens can be classified into small tea growers and large tea growers. The contribution of Assam in Indian Tea Industry is significant (near about 50%) [4]. The tea labour market in Assam is facing challenges related to changes in employment conditions and labour productivity. The situation is unique because both the demand and supply sides of the labour market are influenced by factors like those seen in the informal sector.

Tea production heavily relies on manual labour, where workers pick the tea leaves in the gardens [5]. Both men and women participate in this task. The more leaves an individual picks, the more tea is produced and more payment he receives. Various factors affect a person's ability to work, including biological (like age, sex, and body size), psychological (attitude and motivation), environmental (altitude, temperature), the nature of the work (how intense and long it is), and training [6]. Casual employment is also on the rise in the tea industry due to growing competition and economic factors. To reduce production costs, many owners are hiring contract labour. In Assam, only around 30-40% of tea garden workers are formally employed [7]. Workers' productivity was also declined as evident through absenteeism, strikes, low-quality products, and decreased dedication. Alcohol addiction and aggression further impacted productivity [8]. So, there is a need to analyze the current satisfaction level of estate workers and take necessary actions.

The selected parameters give us a comprehensive idea about the current job satisfaction of the tea garden workers. Recent research shows that higher own absolute wages and internal reference wages within a firm positively impact workers' perceived wage fairness, enhancing job satisfaction [9]. Similarly, superior's behavior [10] and work safety [11] also plays an important role in employees job satisfaction and thereby impacting the job performance of the employee concerned.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Assam state has 35 districts. Out of which this study was conducted at Biswanath District as it has high concentration of small tea plantations [12] as well as large tea gardens. To represent 780567 rural population of Biswanath district out of which 20 percent works in tea gardens [13], 138 respondents were selected purposively during 2023-2024 from various tea growing regions of the district based on a screener question "Do you work in tea garden

or factories?”. If the respondent answered yes to the question, a detailed semi-structured questionnaire was filled. The aim of this study was to comprehensively assess the existing satisfaction levels among tea garden workers. Employing a descriptive study design, the research centred on evaluating satisfaction across seven distinct aspects.

Data collection was carried out through the administration of a meticulously designed semi-structured questionnaire to the workers. This schedule covered essential facets such as wage and salary amount, wage regularity, working hours, working conditions, work safety, Training facilities, and superior’s behavior. Responses were captured on a predetermined 5-point scale (Very Satisfied (5) , Somewhat Satisfied (4), Neutral (3), Somewhat dissatisfied (2) and very dissatisfied (1)), allowing for quantitative evaluation.

To derive meaningful insights, the collected data underwent quantitative analysis, involving the generation of frequency and percentage tables. These tables effectively showcased the distribution of satisfaction levels within each aspect.



Figure 1 Location of Assam and Biswanath District

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-economic profile of the respondents

The socio-economic profile of the respondents reveals a diverse range of ages and a notable gender disparity. In the youngest age group (18-30 years), there were 39 respondents, with a predominance of males (28) compared to females (11). The 31-43 years age group comprised the largest cohort, with 57 respondents, including 34 males and 23 females. In the 44-56 years age group, there were 28 respondents, consisting of 17 males and 11 females. The oldest age group, those aged more than 57 years, included 14 respondents, with 9 males and 5 females. Overall, the total number of respondents was 138, with males (88) significantly outnumbering females (50).

Table 1: Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
Between 18 to 30 years	28	11	39
Between 31 to 43 years	34	23	57
Between 44 to 56 years	17	11	28
More than 57 years	9	5	14
Total	88	50	138

The data illustrates a clear gender imbalance, with males consistently outnumbering females across all age groups. This disparity may reflect underlying socio-cultural factors that influence the participation of females in the workforce.

The socio-economic landscape of tea garden workers in Biswanath district is varied. There was a notable difference in education levels, annual income, and gender distribution. Most respondents have completed their primary education (47 males and 37 females). 38 individuals had 10th-grade education, making it one of the largest groups, while only 2 respondents have completed their 12th-grade education, indicating very few workers have reached this level. Among the 12 illiterate workers, their incomes range from "between 50001 to 100000 rupees" to "between 100001 to 300000 rupees." Specifically, 5 illiterate workers (3 females and 2 males) earn between "50001 to 100000 rupees," and 7 illiterate workers (4 females and 3 males) earn between "100001 to 300000 rupees."

The "Others" education category includes 2 males with incomes ranging from "50001" to over "300001 rupees." The largest educational group is those with primary education, totalling 84 respondents. Of these, 42 workers (21 males and 21 females) earn between "50001 to 100000 rupees," and 39 workers (23 males and 16 females) earn between "100001 to 300000 rupees."

Table 2 reveals that most respondents have primary education and earn between "50001-300000," rupees annually and there is a clear gender disparity with males generally having higher incomes and more diverse educational backgrounds. The findings point to several areas for improvement, including the implementation of gender-inclusive policies to ensure equitable participation and compensation, enhancing educational and training opportunities to elevate skill levels and potential earnings, and addressing the gaps in data for accurate representation and targeted interventions. These efforts are essential for improving the overall satisfaction and welfare of the tea garden laborers.

Table 2: Gender, Income, and Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Income Range	Gender	Illiterate	Primary	10th Pass	12th Pass	Others	Total
Less than 50000 rupees	Male	0	3	0	0	0	3
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0
Between 50001 to 100000 rupees	Male	2	21	22	1	1	47
	Female	3	21	2	0	0	26
Between 100001 to 300000 rupees	Male	3	23	11	0	0	37
	Female	4	16	3	1	0	24
More than 300001 rupees	Male	0	0	0	0	1	1
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	Male	5	47	33	1	2	88
	Female	7	37	5	1	0	50

3.2 Job Satisfaction of Tea Garden workers

The analysis of satisfaction among tea garden workers at Biswanath district with respect to various aspects of their employment reveals a complex range of sentiments. This examination encompasses wage and salary amounts, regularity of payments, working hours, working conditions, work safety, training facilities, and superior's behavior.

Wage and Salary Amount

The wage and salary amounts are a significant point of contention among the workers. A substantial proportion, 29 individuals (21.0%), reported being very dissatisfied with their wages. Additionally, 37 respondents (26.8%) indicated being somewhat dissatisfied. This combined dissatisfaction rate of nearly half (47.8%) underscores a critical issue that needs addressing. Conversely, a smaller fraction of 29 respondents (21.0%) were somewhat satisfied, and only 2 individuals (1.4%) were very satisfied. The remaining 41 respondents (29.7%) held a neutral stance, suggesting a balanced viewpoint among them. This distribution highlights a pressing need for wage adjustments or improved communication about wage structures to enhance satisfaction levels among workers.

Wage and Salary Regularity

Satisfaction with the regularity of wage and salary payments shows a more neutral or slightly positive trend. Specifically, 56 individuals (40.6%) reported a neutral stance on the regularity of their payments. Meanwhile, 28 respondents (20.3%) were somewhat satisfied, and 4 individuals (2.9%) reported being very satisfied. However, dissatisfaction remains a concern, with 14 individuals (10.1%) being very dissatisfied and 36 respondents (26.1%) indicating they were somewhat dissatisfied. This data underscores the importance of consistent wage disbursements to enhance satisfaction among workers.

Working Hours

The sentiments regarding working hours are mixed. A total of 25 individuals (18.1%) expressed being very dissatisfied with their working hours, while 39 respondents (28.3%) indicated being somewhat dissatisfied. On the other hand, a notable proportion of 28 individuals (20.3%) reported being very satisfied, and 22 respondents (15.9%) conveyed being somewhat satisfied. The neutral stance maintained by 24 individuals (17.4%) suggests varied experiences, potentially influenced by individual roles or expectations. Addressing discrepancies in working hours and ensuring a fair distribution of work could significantly enhance overall satisfaction.

Working Conditions

Responses regarding working conditions are predominantly neutral to negative. Specifically, 16 individuals (11.6%) were very dissatisfied, and 49 respondents (35.5%) reported being somewhat dissatisfied. A significant portion of 54 individuals (39.1%) maintained a neutral stance, indicating a balanced viewpoint. On a more positive note, 13 respondents (9.4%) expressed being somewhat satisfied, and 6 individuals (4.3%) were very satisfied. This distribution highlights the need for improvements in working conditions to enhance overall satisfaction.

Work Safety

Work safety is a critical area of concern, with a considerable proportion of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. Specifically, 45 individuals (32.6%) were very dissatisfied, and 57 respondents (41.3%) indicated being somewhat dissatisfied. Only a small fraction expressed satisfaction, with 9 respondents (6.5%) being somewhat satisfied and a single individual (0.7%) being very satisfied. The neutral stance held by 26 individuals (18.8%) suggests varying perceptions of safety conditions. This data underscores the urgency of enhancing safety measures to ensure a secure working environment.

Training Facilities

Satisfaction levels regarding training facilities show a mixed response. A total of 26 individuals (18.8%) were very dissatisfied, and 28 respondents (20.3%) indicated being somewhat dissatisfied. A noteworthy proportion of 30 individuals (21.7%) maintained a

neutral stance, while 29 respondents (21.0%) were somewhat satisfied. Additionally, 25 individuals (18.1%) expressed being very satisfied. These results indicate a balanced yet slightly positive perspective, suggesting the need for continuous improvement and expansion of training opportunities to further enhance satisfaction.

Superior's Behavior

Responses regarding satisfaction with superior's behavior are predominantly neutral to negative. A significant proportion of 66 individuals (47.8%) were somewhat dissatisfied, while 6 respondents (4.3%) expressed being very dissatisfied. However, 56 individuals (40.6%) maintained a neutral stance. On the positive side, 6 respondents (4.3%) were somewhat satisfied, and 4 individuals (2.9%) expressed being very satisfied. These findings indicate a need for enhanced communication and management practices to improve relationships between workers and their superiors.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of satisfaction levels among tea garden workers in Biswanath district reveals significant areas of concern, particularly regarding wages, work safety, and superior behavior. The high levels of dissatisfaction in these areas highlight the urgent need for interventions to improve labour conditions and overall satisfaction. While there are positive aspects, such as the relatively higher satisfaction with training facilities and working hours for some respondents, the overall sentiment underscores the need for a holistic approach to address the diverse needs and concerns of the labour force.

Improving wage structures, ensuring regular and timely payments, enhancing working conditions and safety measures, and fostering positive relationships between workers and their superiors are critical steps toward achieving a more satisfied and productive workforce. Moreover, continuous engagement with the labour force to understand their evolving needs and concerns will be essential in maintaining and improving satisfaction levels over time. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for policymakers and industry leaders aiming to enhance the welfare and satisfaction of tea garden workers.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

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