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Study the Socio-Economic Condition of the Tea Enterprise Workers in Champawat District of Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT: The present study was planned to determine the demographic profile and socioeconomic condition of tea garden workers. The researcher used a descriptive survey method as well as simple random sampling. One hundred and twenty tea garden workers were included as a sample for the study. The research technique for data collecting was a structured questionnaire. The data portrays plantation workers as economically marginalized, with low education, modest housing, small landholdings, and high dependence on loans, reinforcing their vulnerability and reliance on government welfare schemes. This suggests that despite economic constraints, digital connectivity has penetrated plantation communities, potentially offering opportunities for improved communication, access to welfare schemes, and financial inclusion.

KEYWORDS: Demography, Digital, Plantation, Socio-economic status, Employment status, Monthly Income.

INTRODUCTION

Tea is the one of the most favourite beverages all across the world. The global consumption of tea is 6.3 million metric tonnes in 2020 and daily consumption of the tea is estimated to be between 5-6 billion caps a day (UK Tea & Infusion Association). For Indians, Tea is the first beverage in the morning and on an average, they consumed three times in a day. Therefore, total national consumption estimated at over I billion cups every day. “India is one of the world’s largest tea producers, producing around twenty-seven percent of the world’s tea. India produces both CTC (Crush, Tear and Curl) and Orthodox forms of tea” (Saikia et al. 2013). In India, CTC is the most popular form of tea. There are tea plantation industries in India’s north-eastern and southern states.

The Champawat district in Uttarakhand is home to one of the largest organic Tea plantations in the Himalaya region, covering about 235 hectares and producing black, white and green tea under the brand “Uttarakhand Tea”. The tea sector remains a pillar of rural employment in India, but sustaining a workforce requires better wages, welfare schemes, and modernization of plantation. In areas like Champawat, tea tourism and organic branding are helping diversify income sources and strengthen local employment.

According to Ansari and Sheereen (2016) Tea industries are one of the most important industries in India due to their foreign cash and large employment opportunity for women and rural people. The Indian tea industry directly employs about 1.2 million workers, with nearly 58% being women (Press release). Binitha and Raj (2018) stated that the socio-economic status of the tea workers remained inadequate in term of salaries, hygiene, working, and living conditions for a variety of reasons.

Socioeconomic status of workers indicates to their social and economic position in society, typically measured by income, education, and occupation. It reflects both material resources and social prestige, shaping opportunities, career advancement. It has the potential to yield critical implications for employee overall well-being (**Gabriel et al, 2025**) and considered as an important determinant of psychological and life outcomes (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019, **Antonoplis, S. (2023**). Lower SES is linked to poor living conditions, limited opportunities, and adverse health, while higher, SES provides better resources, healthier lifestyles, and longer life expectancy (**Shah, Bhaskar & Singh (2025)**). **Oulakh & Vinay (2017)** investigated female workers in electronic watch assembly units and found that socio-economic status significantly influences job satisfaction. Most employees reported moderate satisfaction, with income, education, caste, occupation, and family possessions emerging as key determinants. Several studies have been conducted worldwide to examine the socio-economic condition of the tea plantation workers and very few of these have been conducted in Uttarakhand. However, no systematic efforts have been made to study the socio-economic status of the tea workers in Champawat district of Uttarakhand. So, a thorough study is required in this particular geographical area, which will serve as a foundation of future research.

Objectives

The following are the study's objectives:

1. To investigate the demographic profile of tea workers in Champawat District.
2. To determine the socioeconomic status of tea workers in Champawat District.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A descriptive research method based on the study's goals and objectives was used. In the present study, a cross-sectional descriptive survey method was used to analyse the current socioeconomic condition of tea workers. All together total one hundred twenty tea workers were selected from three division of tea enterprise i.e. tea nursery, tea garden and tea factory for personal interview using stratified random sampling technique. A structured and validated questionnaire was used to gathered the necessary information through field. Data was analysed by using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

1. Demographic Profile of the Tea worker

This study examines the demographic characteristics of workers employed in tea gardens, nurseries, and factories. Variables analyzed include age, religion, caste, and marital status. The findings reveal distinct patterns across workplace types, highlighting differences in age composition, social background, and marital status. These insights contribute to understanding labor dynamics and socio-cultural factors influencing employment in these sectors.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of workers (n = 120)

Variable	Category	Tea Garden F (%)	Nursery F (%)	Factory F (%)
Age	18–27	6 (8.0)	2 (5.0)	1 (20.0)
	27–38	17 (22.7)	12 (30.0)	1 (20.0)
	38–47	24 (32.0)	15 (37.5)	1 (20.0)
	47 above	28 (37.3)	11 (27.5)	2 (40.0)
Religion	Hinduism	74 (98.7)	40 (100)	5 (100)
	Islam	1 (1.3)	0	0
Caste	General	68 (90.7)	40 (100)	5 (100)
	SC	7 (9.3)	0	0
Marital Status	Married	66 (88.0)	31 (77.5)	3 (60.0)
	Unmarried	2 (2.7)	1 (2.5)	0
	Single (Separated)	5 (6.7)	3 (7.5)	2 (40.0)
	Widow	2 (2.7)	5 (12.5)	0
Total Family Members	0–2	7 (9.3)	5 (12.5)	1 (20.0)
	2–4	23 (30.7)	10 (25.0)	0
	4–6	17 (22.7)	15 (37.5)	2 (40.0)
	6+	28 (37.3)	10 (25.0)	2 (40.0)
Number of Children	0–2	45 (60.0)	29 (72.5)	3 (60.0)
	2–4	26 (34.7)	9 (22.5)	2 (40.0)
	4–6	4 (5.3)	2 (5.0)	0
Number of Males	0–2	49 (65.3)	26 (65.0)	3 (60.0)
	2–4	20 (26.7)	12 (30.0)	2 (40.0)
	4–6	6 (8.0)	2 (5.0)	0
Number of Females	0–2	46 (61.3)	23 (57.5)	4 (80.0)
	2–4	26 (34.7)	17 (42.5)	1 (20.0)
	4–6	2 (2.7)	0	0
	6+	1 (1.3)	0	0

Table 1 shown the tea garden worker's age ranges from 18 to above 47 years old. In Tea Garden, majority of the workers fall between the 38–47 (32%) and 47 above (37.3%) age groups, showing an older workforce. Whereas in tea nursery, most workers fall in 38–47 (37.5%) and 27–38 (30%), suggesting a relatively younger profile compared to tea gardens. In tea factory, small sample size, but evenly spread across age groups, with slightly more in 47 above (40%). It was found from the result that no employee under the age of 18 and revealed that the tea estate authorities rigorously follow the Child labour Act. Most of the workers belong to general category of Hindu religion and married in all the sectors.

The demographic distribution of family composition among workers in tea gardens, nurseries, and factories reveals notable variations in household size and gender composition. The majority of tea garden families fall within the larger household categories, with 37.3% reporting six or more members. This contrasts with nurseries, where the most common household size is 4–6 members (37.5%), and factories, where larger families (4–6 and 6+) dominate equally (40% each). These findings suggest that tea garden workers are more likely to belong to extended households, while nursery workers tend to have moderately sized families, and factory workers are concentrated in larger family structures.

Across all sectors, households predominantly report 0–2 children, with tea gardens (60%) and nurseries (72.5%) showing particularly high proportions. Factories also reflect this trend (60%), though a significant minority (40%) report 2–4 children. The data indicates that smaller family sizes in terms of children are common, possibly reflecting economic constraints or changing fertility patterns among these worker groups. Male household members are most frequently reported in the 0–2 category, with tea gardens (65.3%), nurseries (65%), and factories (60%) showing similar distributions. A smaller proportion of households report 2–4 males, particularly in nurseries (30%) and factories (40%). This suggests that male representation within households remains relatively balanced across sectors, with limited variation. Female household members also cluster in the 0–2 category, with tea gardens (61.3%) and nurseries (57.5%) showing majority representation. Factories exhibit an even stronger skew, with 80% of households reporting 0–2 females. Larger female household sizes (4–6 or 6+) are rare, particularly in nurseries and factories, where no households reported more than four females. This pattern highlights a gendered imbalance in household composition, with fewer female members compared to males in most settings.

2. Socio-economic condition of the workers

Table 2: Socio-economic condition of the workers

Variable	Category	Tea Garden F (%)	Nursery F (%)	Factory F (%)
Monthly Household Income	5k–10k	32 (42.7)	17 (42.5)	5 (100)
	10k–15k	25 (33.3)	15 (37.5)	0
	15k–20k	13 (17.3)	2 (5.0)	0
	20k+	5 (6.7)	6 (15.0)	0
Household Working Members	One	13 (17.3)	9 (22.5)	0
	Two	50 (66.7)	28 (70.0)	3 (60.0)
	Three	9 (12.0)	3 (7.5)	1 (20.0)
	Four	3 (4.0)	0	1 (20.0)
Multiple Income Sources	Yes	9 (12.0)	3 (7.5)	1 (20.0)
	No	66 (88.0)	37 (92.5)	4 (80.0)
Mobile Phone availability	Yes	60 (80.0)	33 (82.5)	4 (80.0)
	No	15 (20.0)	7 (17.5)	1 (20.0)
Education	Illiterate	19 (25.3)	9 (22.5)	1 (20.0)
	No formal education	27 (36.0)	11 (27.5)	1 (20.0)
	Class 1–5	14 (18.7)	7 (17.5)	2 (40.0)
	Class 6–9	9 (12.0)	10 (25.0)	1 (20.0)
	SSC/HSC	5 (6.7)	3 (7.5)	0
	Graduate	1 (1.3)	0	0
Type of House	Kaccha	24 (32.0)	10 (25.0)	1 (20.0)
	Semi-Pucca	34 (45.3)	21 (52.5)	3 (80.0)
	Pucca	15 (20.0)	8 (20.0)	0
	Rented	2 (2.7)	1 (2.5)	1 (20.0)
Bedrooms in House	One	15 (20.0)	4 (10.0)	1 (20.0)
	Two	43 (57.3)	27 (67.5)	3 (60.0)

	Three	10 (13.3)	9 (22.5)	1 (20.0)
	Four	7 (9.3)	0	0
Land Owned	1–5 Nali	49 (65.3)	30 (75.0)	4 (80.0)
	5–10 Nali	19 (25.3)	8 (20.0)	0
	10–15 Nali	3 (4.0)	1 (2.5)	1 (20.0)
	15+	4 (5.3)	1 (2.5)	0
Bank Account	Yes	75 (100)	40 (100)	5 (100)
Economic Status	BPL	65 (86.7)	32 (80.0)	3 (60.0)
	APL	6 (8.0)	2 (5.0)	0
	Red Card	4 (5.3)	4 (10.0)	2 (40.0)
	Other	0	2 (5.0)	0
Daily Newspaper	Yes	3 (4.0)	1 (2.5)	0
	No	72 (96.0)	39 (97.5)	5 (100)
House on Rent	Yes	1 (1.3)	0	0
	No	74 (98.7)	40 (100)	5 (100)
Loan Taken	Yes	51 (68.0)	12 (30.0)	3 (60.0)
	No	24 (32.0)	28 (70.0)	2 (40.0)
Purpose of Loan	Business	1 (1.3)	1 (2.5)	0
	Personal	10 (13.3)	6 (15.0)	2 (40.0)
	Animal Husbandry	7 (9.3)	1 (2.5)	1 (20.0)
	Home Loan	7 (9.3)	4 (10.0)	0
	None	51 (68.0)	28 (70.0)	2 (40.0)

Monthly Household Income: The analysis of monthly household income across tea garden, nursery, and factory workers revealed significant disparities in earnings and highlights the economic vulnerability of plantation labor households. A substantial proportion of tea garden households (42.7%) fall within the lowest income bracket of ₹5,000–₹10,000 per month, followed by 33.3% in the ₹10,000–₹15,000 range. Only 17.3% reported earnings between ₹15,000–₹20,000, while a marginal 6.7% exceed ₹20,000. This distribution was indicated that the majority of tea garden workers remain concentrated in the lower-income categories, reflecting the predominance of casual and daily wage employment in the sector. Similar to tea garden workers, nursery households also cluster in the lower-income brackets, with 42.5% earning ₹5,000–₹10,000 and 37.5% earning ₹10,000–₹15,000. A very small fraction (5%) report incomes between ₹15,000–₹20,000, while 15% exceed ₹20,000. Compared to tea garden workers, nursery workers show slightly better representation in the higher-income category, suggesting marginally more stable or skilled employment opportunities. Factory households exhibit the most extreme concentration, with 100% of respondents reporting incomes in the lowest bracket (₹5,000–₹10,000). No factory households fall into higher income categories, underscoring the acute economic vulnerability of this group. This reflects the limited earning potential and wage stagnation prevalent in factory-based plantation work.

Household working members and income sources: The analysis of household working members and income sources among tea garden, nursery, and factory workers reveals important aspects of their economic structure. In tea garden households, the majority (66.7%) reported having two earning members, while 17.3% had only one, and smaller proportions had three (12%) or four (4%) earners. A similar pattern was observed among nursery workers, with 70% of households having two earners and 22.5% relying on a single worker. Factory households, though fewer in number, showed a slightly different trend, with 60% having two earners, while 20% each reported three and four earners. Despite the presence of multiple working members, most households did not diversify their income sources; 88% of tea garden, 92.5% of nursery, and 80% of factory households reported relying on a single source of income. This indicates a heavy dependence on plantation-related work, leaving families vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations and wage instability.

Mobile availability: On a positive note, mobile phone availability was relatively high across all groups, with 80% of tea garden, 82.5% of nursery, and 80% of factory households reporting access. This suggests that despite economic constraints, digital connectivity has penetrated plantation communities, potentially offering opportunities for improved communication, access to welfare schemes, and financial inclusion.

Educational Attainment: The data revealed that educational attainment among tea garden, nursery, and factory workers remains significantly limited. A considerable proportion of respondents were illiterate, with 25.3 percent of tea garden, 22.5 percent of nursery, and 20 percent of factory workers reporting no literacy skills. Furthermore, 36 percent of tea garden workers and 27.5 percent of nursery workers have no formal education, underscoring the restricted access to schooling within plantation communities. Only a small fraction of respondents progressed beyond primary education, and graduates were virtually absent across all groups. This pattern was highlighted the intergenerational persistence of low educational achievement, which in turn constrains opportunities for upward mobility.

Housing and Living Conditions: Housing conditions reflect the economic vulnerability of plantation households. The majority of families reside in semi-pucca houses (45.3% tea garden, 52.5% nursery, 80% factory), while a smaller share live in kaccha dwellings. Pucca houses were relatively rare, and rented accommodation was minimal. Bedroom distribution further illustrates modest living standards, with most households reporting only one or two rooms, leading to overcrowding. These findings suggest that housing infrastructure remains basic, with limited scope for improvement without external intervention.

Land Ownership:

Landholdings are concentrated in small parcels, with most households owning between one and five nali (65.3% tea garden, 75% nursery, 80% factory). Larger holdings above ten nali are rare, indicating subsistence-level agriculture rather than significant asset accumulation. This limited land ownership restricts opportunities for supplementary income and reinforces dependence on plantation wages.

Financial Inclusion and Economic Status: Encouragingly, all households reported having bank accounts, reflecting progress in financial inclusion initiatives. However, economic status remains precarious, with the majority classified as Below Poverty Line (86.7% tea garden, 80% nursery, 60% factory). Access to information is minimal, as nearly all households lack daily newspapers, which may be attributed to both affordability constraints and limited literacy.

Loan Dependency: Loan dependency is notable, particularly among tea garden workers, where 68 percent reported borrowing. The purposes of loans are primarily personal, housing-related, or linked to animal husbandry, with business-related borrowing being negligible. Factory workers also show high reliance on loans (60%), while nursery workers are comparatively less indebted (30%). This pattern indicates that borrowing is often linked to survival and basic needs rather than entrepreneurial activity, reinforcing the vulnerability of plantation households.

DISCUSSION

Tea gardens are dominated by older, married workers with some caste diversity whereas nurseries attract younger workers but show higher widowhood. Factories, though small in sample, revealed a mixed age profile and a surprisingly high rate of separation among workers. The findings highlight that plantation labor households, particularly those engaged in tea garden and factory work, are overwhelmingly confined to low-income categories. While nursery workers show marginal improvement in income diversification, the overall picture remains one of economic vulnerability. The concentration of workers in the lowest income brackets directly impacts their ability to access education, healthcare, and savings, perpetuating cycles of poverty within plantation communities. These results are consistent with earlier studies (Bhowmik 2011; Verma and Gupta 2015), which emphasized the persistence of low wages and casual employment in plantation economies. The absence of significant upward mobility in income categories further reflects structural constraints in plantation labor markets, where seasonal demand and reliance on manual labor limit opportunities sustained financial improvement. The analysis of household demographics among tea garden, nursery, and factory workers reveals distinct patterns in family size, child composition, and gender distribution. Tea garden workers are more likely to belong to larger households, with 37.3% reporting six or more family members. This aligns with prior research showing that tea garden labourers in Assam and West Bengal often live in extended family structures due to socio-economic constraints and traditional living arrangements (Rai, 2022; Sinha et al., 2023; Datta & Mete, 2021). In contrast, nursery workers are concentrated in the 4–6 member range (37.5%), reflecting moderately sized households. Factory workers show polarization, with households either small (0–2 members, 20%) or large (4–6 and 6+, each 40%). Studies of manufacturing workers in India suggest that factory labourers often migrate with nuclear families or live in shared accommodations, which may explain the skew toward smaller or larger family clusters (Srivastava, 2012; Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Labour Bureau, 2021; Bhagat, 2017).

The socioeconomic profile of tea garden, nursery, and factory workers demonstrates persistent marginalization characterized by low educational attainment, modest housing, small landholdings, and high dependence on loans. Although financial inclusion has improved through universal bank account ownership while the majority of households remain below the poverty line. The findings of this study are consistent with earlier research on tea garden workers in Assam and West Bengal, which similarly reported low wages, poor housing, and limited educational attainment (Roy & Chaudhuri 2021; Rai 2022; Adhikary & Kumar 2025). Furthermore, the restricted access to education among plantation households has been highlighted in several reviews (Das & Laskar 2025; Sundas & Saha 2023), while Bhowmik (2015) emphasized the persistent violation of housing and wage standards in tea estates.

The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions in education, housing, and livelihood diversification to break cycles of poverty and enhance the resilience of plantation communities.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study demonstrates that plantation workers, particularly those in tea gardens and factories, remain economically marginalized, with the majority of households earning less than ₹15,000 per month. Such low levels of income restrict access to basic amenities, hinder educational attainment, and perpetuate intergenerational poverty. Overall, the data portrays plantation workers as economically marginalized, with low education, modest housing, small landholdings, and high dependence on loans, reinforcing their vulnerability and reliance on government welfare schemes.

To address these challenges, several policy measures are recommended:

- **Wage Reforms**: Plantation authorities and government agencies should consider revising wage structures to ensure fair compensation, particularly for factory workers who are confined to the lowest income bracket.
- **Employment Security**: Transitioning workers from casual and daily wage contracts to permanent employment would provide greater financial stability.
- **Skill Development**: Introducing vocational training and skill enhancement programs could diversify income sources and reduce dependence on seasonal plantation work.
- **Financial Inclusion**: Awareness campaigns to promote savings habits and access to banking services, in line with schemes such as *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana*, would strengthen household financial resilience.
- **Social Welfare Integration**: Linking plantation workers to government welfare schemes, including *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* for clean cooking fuel, would improve living standards and reduce health risks.

In conclusion, while tea garden and nursery workers show some variation in income distribution, the overall economic status of plantation households remains precarious. A coordinated effort by plantation management, government agencies, and civil society is essential to uplift the socioeconomic conditions of this marginalized workforce.

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