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The COVID-19 pandemic: Assessment of migrant families' profile characteristics in the North Garo Hills district of Meghalaya

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Abstract
Following a coronavirus-induced lockdown on migrants, the present study made an effort to assess the profile characteristics of migrant families in Meghalaya's North Garo Hills district. The primary data for the study were gathered through a telephone survey as well as in-person interviews with 100 laborers between April and May 2020. The findings of this study revealed that males outnumbered women among those who responded. The majority of the migratory population was made up of young age groups; all of them belonged to members of the scheduled tribe. In terms of education, it was determined that the majority of the respondents had completed high school. Furthermore, they maintained a small family of up to five members with their labour occupations and reported having a medium level of exposure to the media, whereas 21 and 19 percent reported having low and high levels of exposure, respectively. Since the coronavirus is more than just a health emergency, it's important to prevent as many fatalities as possible while also providing social and financial security for vulnerable populations and the families of migrant workers. Strategies like improving education and training could open up new economic opportunities for rural populations, reducing the need for migration and enabling better flow management to improve migrants' socioeconomic conditions. Giving them practical skills like business and marketing know-how and a specific grasp of rural activities may improve their chances of landing a job or starting a microbusiness.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, migrants, migration, socio-economic

1. Introduction
The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which has spread like wildfire throughout the modern globe, has killed thousands of people and caused enormous economic harm. The disease initially appeared in late December of 2019 in the Wuhan region of China, with its centre in Hubei Province. With symptoms including coughing, fever, and breathing problems in more severe cases, the disease results in a respiratory (flu-like) infection. As a result, on March 24, 2020, the Indian government proclaimed COVID-19 a national catastrophe and imposed a full national lockdown to prevent the virus from spreading further. The implementation of stringent lockdowns and other measures, including restrictions on travel between and within states, has ruined the lives of millions of informal workers, particularly migrant laborers.

For ages, migrant workers have been the growth engine, working tirelessly to make sure any region in the world is economically prosperous. With millions of Indians depending on migration for a living, they form the basis of the Indian economy. Ironically, while being the backbone of modern India and an integral component of our civilization, migrants are also a part of "Invisible India," a part that remains unrecognized, unsuitable, and primarily hidden under small barriers, belonging to a host of 126 million migrant workers working silently. It is crucial to understand that migrants are neither victims nor offenders, but rather vulnerable people.

Migration is frequently considered as an economic, social, and political activity, which ignores the economic benefits of migration. This might be due to the fact that it burdens metropolitan regions, drives productive persons out of rural areas, disrupts family life, leads to informal labour exploitation, and creates administrative and legal issues. Migrants are frequently discriminated against, exploited on occasion, and frequently paid less than non-migrant labour with bad working conditions. (Khandelwal, Sharma, & Varma, 2012) [19]

As a result, migrants are frequently forced to live in illegal colonies with limited access to water, drainage, and power, as well as a constant danger of deportation, disease, violence, underpayment, and police harassment.

No exemption is made for the great majority of migrants from the North Garo Hills region. The most prevalent industries in which they work are textiles, manufacturing, construction, service, and housework. Many people have lost their only source of income as a result of the economic implications of the COVID-19 issue. Throughout that period, migrants and their families played a vital role in their lives: they were unable to meet basic needs such as fresh produce, water, shelter, or health care in the cities where they worked or send money back to their rural family, which relied on their migration income.

2. Materials and Methods
This study was conducted in the specifically selected North Garo Hills region of Meghalaya state during the emergence of COVID-19, which caused migrants to return home. Resubelpara, Bajengdoba, and Kharkutta are the three main blocks that form the North Garo Hills region. Based on the ease of transportation and accessibility of migrant workers, Resubelpara and Bajengdoba were selected to conduct the study. For the selection of blocks, villages, and migrants, a multistage sampling approach was used. Two villages were selected from each of the two blocks. Each block was assigned a sample size of 50, and 25 respondents from each of the four villages were selected, constituting a total sample size of 100 respondents.

A structured interview schedule served as the primary method for collecting the essential data for this study. With the study's objectives in mind, data were collected from all respondents through personal interviews conducted both in-person and over the phone in the respondents' native language, Garo. Information pertaining to the profile characteristics of migrant workers was gathered. Thus, socio-personal, socio-economic, and communicative characteristics were considered for defining profile traits. For assigning scores to variables with certain predefined schedules, several scales have also been employed, such as the scoring technique of Anamica (2010) and the Socioeconomic scale of Trivedi (1963). The perceived responses of the respondents were acquired, and descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and the mean were used to interpret the information available from them.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1 Socio-personal characteristics of the respondents
Table 1 depicts the socio-personal characteristics of migrant workers, which include age, gender, caste, family size, education, and social participation. The majority of migrant workers (71 percent) were found to be young people who wanted to explore new employment opportunities and make more money. In terms of education, 49 percent had completed middle school, as parents of young migrant workers from rural areas also cared about providing their children with a solid education, which is the foundation for someone's moral and professional development. It is to be noted that men make up more than half of the migrants (60 percent) in the North Garo Hills area of Meghalaya. Moreover, the majority (87 percent) of responders had a modest family size and were all members of a scheduled tribe. In addition, 83 percent of respondents indicated that they were not members of any organizations. The most plausible explanation is that they often relocate to other areas in search of employment and are unaware of the significance of such associations.

Table 1: Socio-personal characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Categories	Respondents (N=100)		Mean
		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	
Age	Young age (up to 35 years)	71	71	32.76
	Middle age (36-55 years)	26	26	
	Old age (56 years and above)	3	3	
Gender	Male	60	40	
	Female	40	40	
Caste	Scheduled Class (SC/ST)	100	100	
	Other Backward Class	-	-	
	General	-	-	
Family Size	Small family (up to 5 members)	87	87	1.13
	Large (>5 members)	13	13	
Education	Illiterate	-	-	3.95
	Read only	-	-	
	Read and write	-	-	
	Primary	28	28	
	Middle	49	49	
	High school	23	23	
	Graduate and above	-	-	
Social Participation	No participation	83	83	
	Members of one organisation	17	17	
	Members of more than one organisation	-	-	
	Office bearer	-	-	
	Wider public	-	-	

3.2 Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents
Table 2 shows that 87 percent of respondents rely on their labourer vocation, which includes work in the manufacturing, construction, service, and housekeeping industries. As most respondents (73 percent) did not intend to live there permanently, they purchased fewer materials and items. As a result, they possessed less material goods. Furthermore, 60 percent of migrant workers had a low level of income because the majority of migrants are solely paid via labour.

Table 2: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Categories	Respondents N=100		Mean
		Frequency	Percentage	
Occupational status	Labourer	87	87	1.65
	Caste occupation	-	-	
	Business	-	-	
	Independent profession	-	-	
	Cultivation	-	-	
	Service	13	13	
Material possession	Low (0-6)	73	73	6.04
	Medium (7-12)	27	27	
	High (13-18)	-	-	
Annual Income	Low (<70,551)	60	60	75, 750
	Medium (70,551-1,05,986)	35	35	
	High (>1,05,986)	5	5	

3.3 Communication characteristics of the respondents
The cursory look on table 3 reveals that as far as communication aspects of migrants is concerned, majority of them were having medium access to the media, with 21 percent having low access and 19 percent having high access. Exposure to various forms of mass media, such as radio, television, newspapers, leaflets, mobile phones, and so on, assists migrant workers in learning about job opportunities in urban areas. With this in mind, information was gathered from respondents in terms of the frequency of their exposure to various mass media.

Table 3: Communication characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Categories	Respondents N=100		Mean
		Frequency	Percentage	
Mass Media Exposure	Low (<5)	21	21	4.2
	Medium (5-8)	60	60	
	High (>8)	19	19	

4. Conclusion
The findings of the research revealed that a significant number of migrant workers were young, with males predominating over women and having small family sizes. Given that the respondents were from a tribal state, everyone belonged to the scheduled tribe caste. In terms of education, the vast majority of those polled had graduated from high school. The great majority of migrant workers in the study area did not belong to any social organizations, possibly as a result of their frequent mobility in search of employment and/or their ignorance of the value of such organizations. Furthermore, because they had no plans to live permanently in their areas of employment, the majority of respondents who relied on their labouring occupations for survival had few material possessions. The majority of respondents report having occupations that pay only modest wages. When migrant workers work in industries under the jurisdiction of private companies, such as manufacturing, security, and construction, they run the risk of being exploited. As a result, the government should prioritize offering stable employment, life insurance, health care, and, at the very least, housing. In addition, to reduce the need for migration and ensure better flow management, facilitating education and skills might offer new economic options for rural residents. Giving them practical skills like an understanding of business and marketing as well as particular information about rural activities will improve their prospects of obtaining employment or launching a microbusiness.

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