

Socio-Economic Impacts of Seasonal Migration: A Study of Scheduled Caste Workers in Murarai II Block, Birbhum, West Bengal

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Abstract

This study analyses the socio-economic impacts of seasonal migration among Scheduled Caste labourers in the Murarai-II block of Birbhum district, West Bengal. The study was conducted on 100 households through field surveys and face-to-face interviews. The Analysis of the data reveals that the major causes of seasonal migration in the Murarai-II block, include the scarcity of fertile agricultural land, low agricultural income, unemployment, lack of education, exclusion from government schemes and the burden of debt. Although improvements in infrastructure within district have increased the tendency of Scheduled Caste household members to migrate to neighboring districts and southern Indian states for work thereby to higher family incomes this process has also led to several challenges, including disruptions children's education, health, safety and various other family issues. The study indicates that although seasonal migration resolves short-term problems, no significant change is observed in long-term income. Therefore, the enhancing of rural infrastructure and the effective implementing of appropriate government policies are essential to ensure sustainable development for the Scheduled Caste population.

Keywords: seasonal migration, socio-economic, unemployment, family incomes

Introduction: In rural India, seasonal migration has become a widespread phenomenon. The scarcity of agricultural land, unemployment and the absence of small-scale and cottage industries in rural areas compel the primary earning many household to migrate to urban centers in search of employment. This pattern of migration particular pronounced among marginalized communities. According to the NSSO report, unemployment, reduced agricultural output and a lack of local work are the main causes of migration, and seasonal migration is more prevalent among the poor in rural areas (NSSO, 2007-08). India is characterized by significant social diversity with people from various castes groups residing across different states. According to the 2011 census, Scheduled Castes constitute 29.05 per cent of the total population of West Bengal. Seasonal migration has shown that it is more prevalent among Scheduled Castes and poor communities and helps to reduce poverty (Padhan, 2021). Among this marginalized group, factor such as landlessness, low income, limited employment opportunities and persistent poverty force a substantial proportion of the

population to engage in seasonal migration as a livelihood strategy. Seasonal migration in West Bengal is an important livelihood strategy in the face of uncertain agricultural income (Das, 2019). According to the ILO, the main reasons for migration are informal work, employment insecurity, and a lack of social protection. In several parts of Birbhum district, in West Bengal, Scheduled Castes populations migrate in search of employment to Bardhaman and its neighboring districts. This trends is especially evident in the Murarai II block of Birbhum district, where seasonal migration is a common livelihood practice among the residents. Although such contributes to increased household income, it also result in consequences, particularly in the areas of education, health and family life. In this context, the present study aims to examine the causes, nature and social economic dimensions of seasonal migration among Scheduled Caste labourers in the Murarai II block of Birbhum district. Furthermore, it seeks to analyse in detail the economic impacts of migration on these labourers, in order to present a realistic understanding of the issue and to propose

practical policy recommendations for mitigating associated challenges.

About the Study Area: - The Murarai-II block of Birbhum district, West Bengal, is located in the northern part of the district. The proportion of Scheduled Castes in this block is comparatively high. The area is predominantly rural, with local economy

largely dependent on agriculture. The block is economically underdeveloped due to fallow agricultural land, limited irrigation facilities, a drought-prone area, and the absence of industrial development. These structural constraints results in limited employment opportunities, which, in turn, encourage seasonal migration among the local population.

Map of the Study Area: Murarai II Block in Birbhum District, West Bengal, India

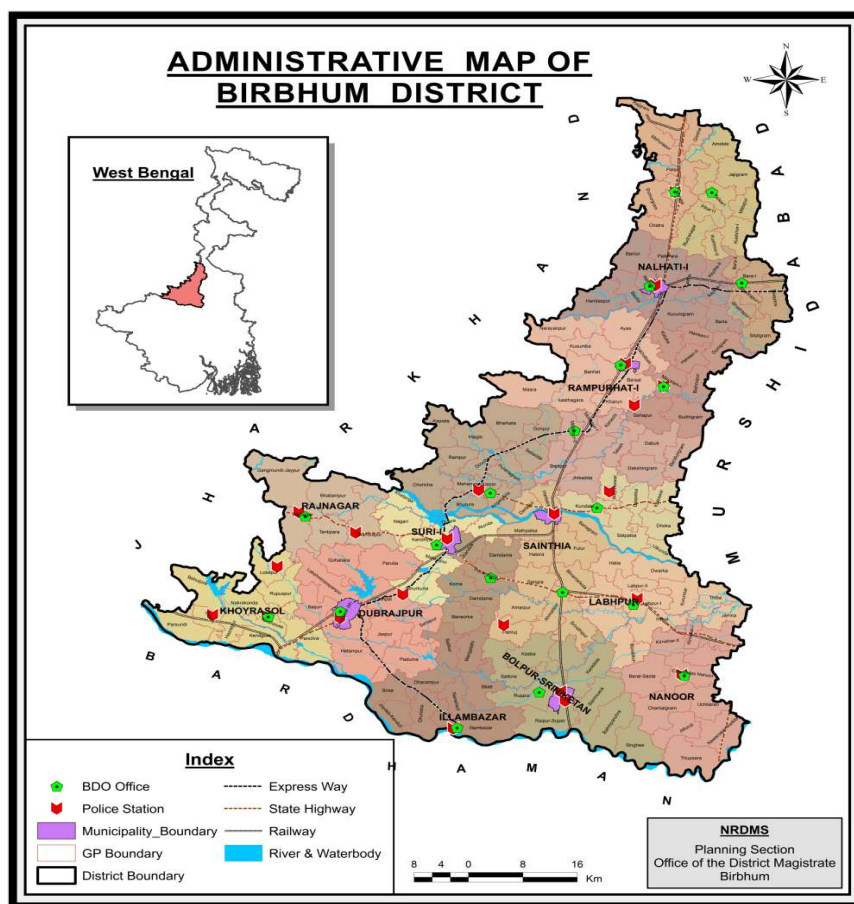


Figure 1: Administrative Map showing Blocks and Infrastructure of Birbhum District, West Bengal.

Source: Rathindra Krishi Vigyan Kendra, n.d.

Literature Review:

Nandi and Sarkar (2020) have shown that landlessness, lack of land and job insecurity, social discrimination and the caste structure all play an important role in the high levels of migration.

Geoforum (2018) research has shown that migration plays a significant role in increasing income. Furthermore, migration alters the structure of rural society, labour relations and gender roles, and also leads to family disconnection.

Hazra (2023) has shown that in rural India, low and uncertain incomes resulting from informal employment push workers towards seasonal migration. The study further states that approximately 80% of workers in India are employed in the informal sector, where there is no job security, fixed wages, or social protection. Furthermore, in rural India, Scheduled Castes and poor families participate more in seasonal migration in search of a livelihood.

Sarkar et al. (2022) have shown that drought is a primary cause of the increase in seasonal migration in rural India. As people dependent on agriculture are more severely affected, they migrate temporarily in search of alternative work.

Haberfeld et al. (1999) have shown that seasonal migration helps to increase income and reduce economic risk, which is a common strategy among rural labour families, and that migration leads to an increase in income.

Research Problems: Seasonal migration is prevalent among the Scheduled Caste population in the Murarai-II block of Birbhum district. Although members of this community rely on seasonal migration as primary livelihood strategy, it is associated with a range of social and familial challenges. For instance, Poverty remains a persistent issue, as Seasonal migration often fails to ensure long term economic stability poverty. Education deprivation is another major concern, particularly among children of Scheduled Caste families, where illiteracy and inadequate access to schooling are commonly observed. In addition social isolation affects many families, as frequent migration disrupts community ties and weakens social integration. Despite the significance of these issues, there is noticeable lack of micro-level research addressing the socio economic consequence of seasonal in this region. Therefore, the central problem of this present study is to examine the relationship between seasonal migration and its dual impacts both in terms of improvement and deterioration on the quality of life of Scheduled Caste labourers.

Objective of the study: The main objectives for this research are:

1. To identify the causes of seasonal migration among the Scheduled Caste community in the Murarai II Block.
2. To examine the changes in family income and economic status resulting from seasonal migration.
3. To analyse the impact of seasonal migration on children's education, health and family structure.

Hypothesis: The following hypotheses have been formulated for this study:

1. H0: Seasonal migration does not cause any change in income.

H1: Seasonal migration causes a change in income.

2. H0: Migration does not have an impact on education.

H1: Migration has an impact on education.

3. H0: Migration does not have an impact on health.

H1: Migration has an impact on health.

Methodology: The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to assess the socio-economic impacts of seasonal migration among the Scheduled Caste labourers of Murarai II Block.

Source of Data: For this study, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected through field surveys, where face-to-face interviews were conducted with selected family members. Secondary data were obtained from books, journals, newspaper articles, government reports, etc.

Sampling Design: A total of 100 Scheduled Caste families were selected for this study using a random sampling method to ensure that the sample is representative of the entire population.

Data Collection Techniques: A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, and

information was gathered through face-to-face interviews.

Variables: The following variables have been considered for this study.

Independent variable - Seasonal Migration.

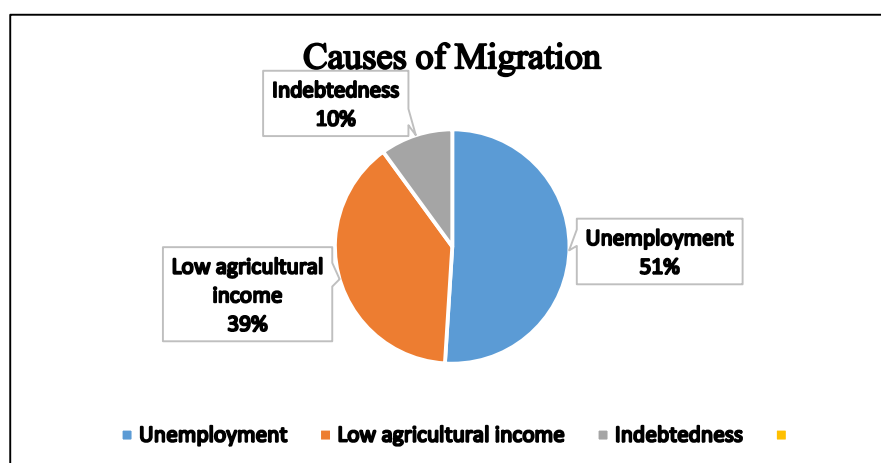
Dependent variables – 1. Household Income 2. Children's Education 3. Health Condition. 4. Family Structure.

Method of Analysis: The collected data have been analysed using the percentage method and presented in tabular form for descriptive discussion.

Analysis and Discussion: For this study, data were collected through face-to-face interviews with 100 Scheduled Caste individuals from the Murarai-II block of Birbhum district, and are discussed below.

Table-I: Major Causes of Migration

Causes of Migration	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployment	51	51
Low agricultural income	39	39
Indebtedness	10	10
Total	100	100%



Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum

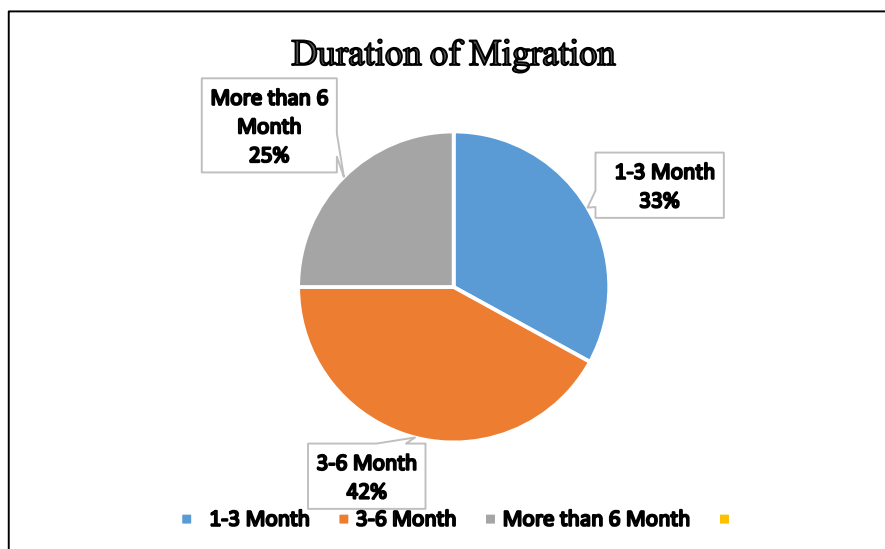
Interpretation: Table I: In the Murarai-II block of Birbhum district, 51 per cent of labourers are compelled to migrate due to unemployment, indicating a weak local economic structure. Furthermore, 39 per cent of families migrate due to a lack of agricultural land,

while 10 per cent migrate because of the burden of debt. Overall findings, reflect a significant shortage of adequate agricultural land and employment opportunities in rural areas.

Table II: Duration of Migration

Duration	Frequency	Percentage
1-3 Month	33	33
3-6 Month	42	42
More than 6 Month	25	25
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



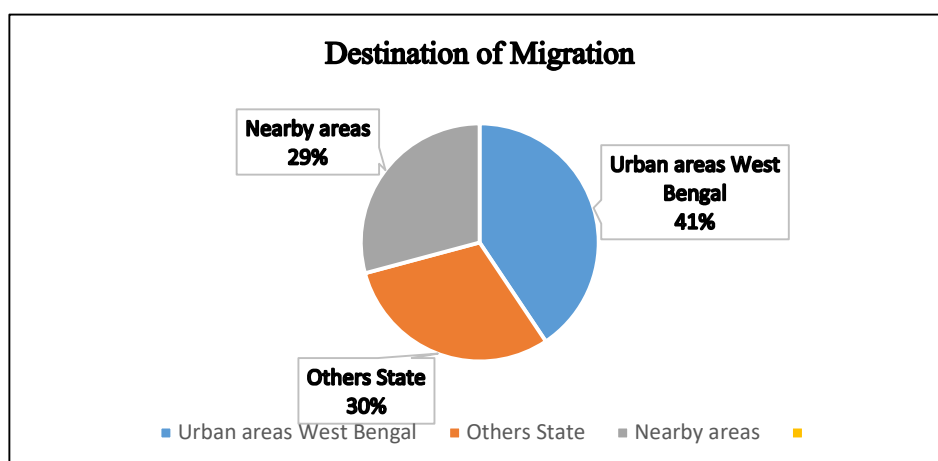
Interpretation: Table-II: According to the collected data, 33 per cent of labourers migrate for 1–3 months, while 42 per cent migrate for 3 to 6 months, this pattern reflects that once the seasonal cultivation are completed, labourers move to others place in search of alternative sources of income. Moreover, 25 per

cent of labourers remain outside for more than 6 months, indicating a gradual shift from temporary migration to more permanent forms of labour migration. Overall, this trend highlights the weakness of the rural economy in the Murarai-II block.

Table III: Destination of Migration

Place	Frequency	Percentage
Urban areas West Bengal	39	39
Others State	29	29
Nearby areas	28	28
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



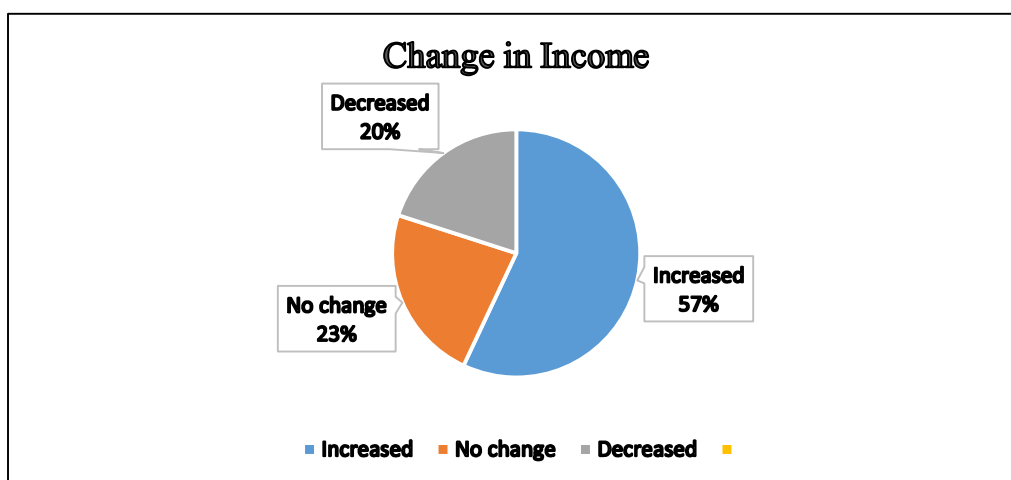
Interpretation: According to data from Table III, 29 per cent of labourers migrate outside the state of West Bengal, indicating a growing dependence on the inter-state labour market. Within West Bengal, although 39 per cent of workers find employment this remains insufficient to meet their livelihood needs.

Moreover, due to a lack of employment opportunities at the local level, only 28 per cent of workers are able to secure work locally. This situation increases their vulnerability to social isolation and exposure to unsafe working environments.

Table IV: Change in Income

Condition	Frequency	Percentage
Increased	57	57
No change	23	23
Decreased	20	20
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



Interpretation: Table IV: According to the collected data, although 57 per cent of workers have experienced an increase incomes, it remains insufficient to meet their needs, as rising transport

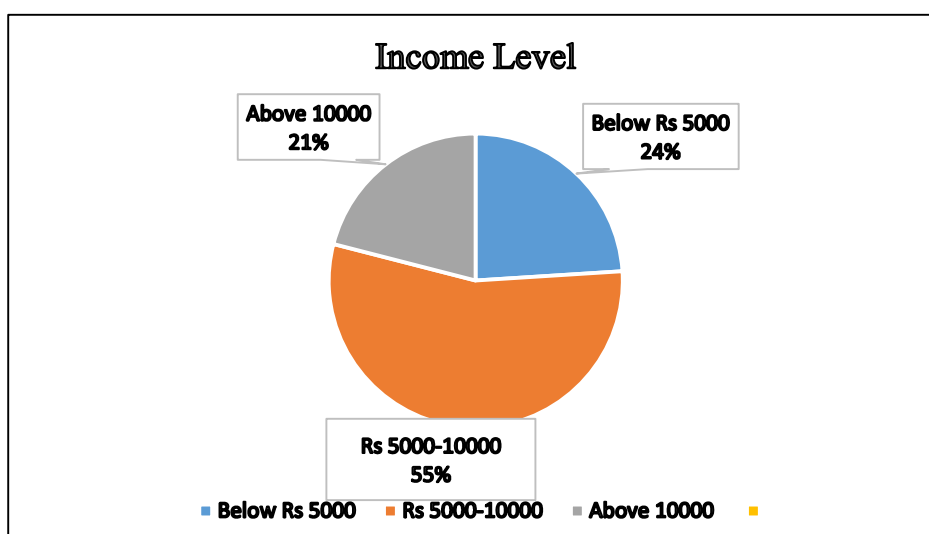
costs, rent, and food expenses at the destination leave little or no scope for saving. Moreover, in 23 per cent of cases, there is no significant change in income, while in 20 per cent of cases, income has decreased,

which does not contribute to sustainable economic improvement.

Table V: Monthly Income Level (After Migration)

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage
Below Rs 5000	24	24
Rs 5000-10000	55	55
Above 10000	21	21
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



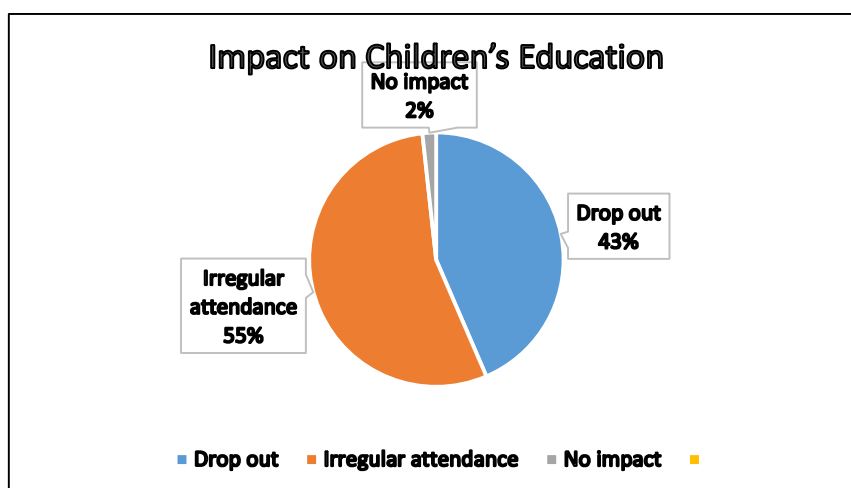
Interpretation: Table V: According to the research data, 24 per cent of workers' incomes are confined to between 5,000 and 10,000 rupees, which falls within the low-income bracket. Furthermore, although 55 per cent of workers earn more than 10,000 rupees, this does not constitute a stable income, as it primarily depends on the nature and availability of work. In

addition, 21 per cent of workers earn below 5,000 rupees, reflecting a situation shaped by unequal economic opportunities. The main cause of this income disparity is the lack of adequate skills and limited access to employment opportunities in the labour market.

Table VI: Impact on Children's Education

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage
Drop out	35	35
Irregular attendance	44	44
No impact	21	21
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



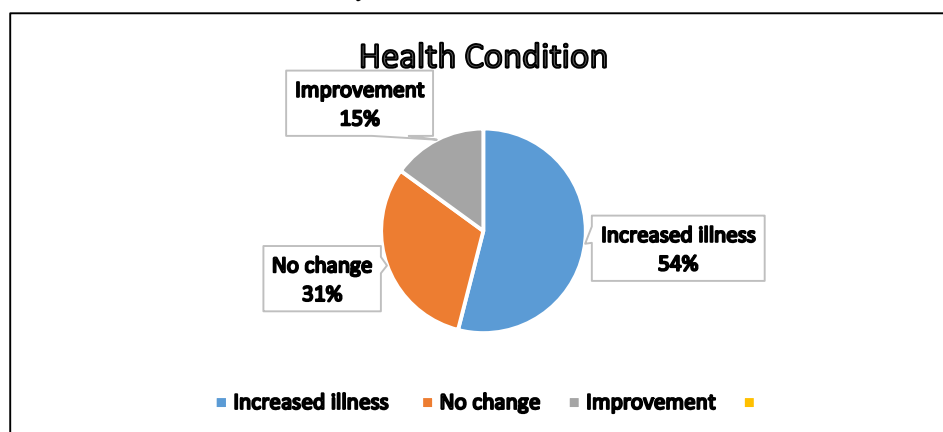
Interpretation: Table VI: According to research findings reveal that 35 per cent of children from labour families drop out of school in search of

income, 44 per cent demonstrate irregular attendance, and 21 per cent tend to undervalue the important of education.

Table VII: Health Condition

Income Level	Frequency	Percentage
Increased illness	54	54
No change	31	31
Improvement	15	15
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



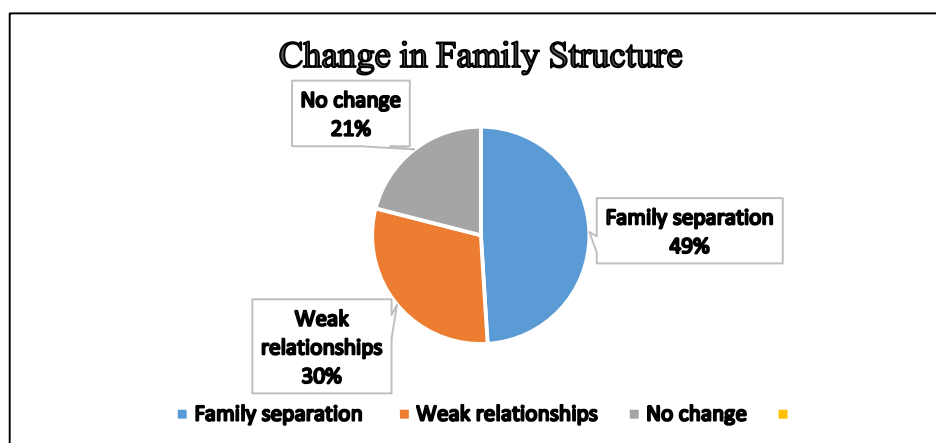
Interpretation: Table VII: According to the research data indicate that 54 per cent of families are facing an increase in physical ailments as result of inadequate protein-rich food and health infrastructure. In contrast, 31 per cent of families have not experienced

any significant change in their health condition. Moreover, although 15 per cent of families have shown improvement in health status, the level of improvements remains inadequate.

Table VIII: Change in Family Structure

Impact	Frequency	Percentage
Family separation	49	49
Weak relationships	30	30
No change	21	21
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field Survey conducted in Murarai-II Block, Birbhum



Interpretation: Table VIII: The findings indicate that 49 per cent of families experience family disconnection as a result of labour migration, while 30 per cent demonstrate a tendency toward weakened relationships. In contrast, 21 per cent of families report no significant change in their relationships.

Hypothesis testing and results: The result of hypothesis testing are given below:

Hypothesis 1: Impact of Income (Table -IV): Analysis of income-related data clearly shows that seasonal migration is a key factor influencing changes in workers' incomes and has a significant impact on earnings. Therefore, H_{01} has been rejected and H_{11} accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Impact of Education (Table -VI): The research findings indicate that migration leads to school drop-out and irregular attendance among children from Scheduled Caste families, thereby disrupting educational continuity. Therefore, H_{02} has been rejected and H_{12} accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Impact of Health (Table -VII): The data show that migration has contributed to an increase in malnutrition and health problems in most families, indicating a negative impact on health conditions. Therefore, H_{03} is rejected and H_{13} is accepted.

Final summary of Hypothesis Testing: The study finds that migration creates barriers to access to basic services such as housing, healthcare and sanitation, thereby affecting the overall quality of life of family. Therefore, H_{04} is rejected and H_{14} is accepted.

Recommendation: Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1. Alternative Employment opportunities:** Timely alternative employment opportunities should be provided in for rural areas to reduce. This can be achieved by strengthening programmes like MGNRGA, micro credit facilities and increasing the number of Self-Help Groups to support rural livelihood.
- 2. Social Security Measures:** Adequate social security measures should be ensured for seasonal migrant workers. This may include provident fund, medical insurance, pension schemes and access to basic welfare service, which can improve their economic and social security.
- 3. Establishment of Child Education Centers in Rural Areas:** Additional child education centers should be established in rural areas to ensure continues education for children of migrant families. Special attention should be given to preventing school dropout and improving regular attendance.

4. **Skill Development Training:** skill development programmes should be organized to enhance the employability of rural workers. Providing vocational training can help reduce migration by creating better income opportunities at the local level.

Conclusion Remarks: This study finds that Scheduled Caste families migrate primarily for their livelihood. Seasonal migration provide temporary relief in terms of income generation and partial resolution of financial problems among Scheduled Caste families in the Murarai-II block. However, the study also observes that these families face several negative impacts, including educational disruption among children, increased health risks, and family disconnection. Therefore, while seasonal migration may offer a short-term solution, it fails to ensure and sustainable and long-term development.

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