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Beedi Rollers' Perception toward Alternative Means of Livelihood amid Economic Benefits

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Abstract

Background: Beedi rolling is one of the principal occupations of women residing in coastal Karnataka. The beedi worker's welfare fund consists of a combination of schemes to improve the living conditions of beedi workers and their families. On the other hand, the government is introducing several anti-tobacco policies, which could lead to insecurity among beedi rollers about their future. As a result, majority of the trade unions believe that alternate livelihood must be provided to the workers. In the midst of economic benefits and stringent tobacco control policies, this study explores the perception of beedi rollers to quit tobacco rolling and engage with an alternative livelihood. **Objectives:** The objectives of this study were as follows: (1) to explore the opinion of beedi workers toward alternate means of livelihood and (2) to identify the benefits availed by the beedi workers. **Methodology:** The study was conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire by interview method in all the seven blocks of the Udupi district of Karnataka with a total of 381 respondents through convenience sampling. The interviewer administered the survey with the help of a predesigned user application which was developed through Kobo Toolbox, and the analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS version 26. **Results:** Although 69% of the respondents believed that beedi rolling is not a secured job, three-fourth of the respondents were not ready to quit the beedi rolling job due to low education, higher age, and lack of financial support to invest in other occupations. **Conclusion:** Our study showed that most of the participants were full-time beedi rollers and most of them were not ready to shift to other jobs due to old age, lack of experience with other vocations, and benefits availed. There is a need to focus on strengthening skill development programs and introduce sustainable economic alternatives to the beedi rollers.

Keywords: Health economics, rural, tobacco, welfare measures

INTRODUCTION

Beedi rolling is a home-based industry, which is the main occupation of women, residing in the villages throughout the country.^[1,2] In India, 55 lakh beedi workers have registered under the Ministry of Labour and Employment.^[3] Over 2 lakh workers are engaged in beedi industries in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, of which 90% are beedi rollers.^[4] Beedi rollers work on a piece-rate basis, and they collect all the raw materials from authorized contractors and handover the finished products for a minimum wage rate.^[5] The Indian Government has enacted several legislative measures to regulate the working conditions and provide welfare schemes to the beedi workers and their families.^[6] The government provides cash benefits, medical benefits, educational support, maternity benefit, and other benefits like house building, and ensures minimum wages to the beedi workers. However, the unorganized nature of the beedi industry and prevalent

subcontracting system appears to be the main bottlenecks, not only in the proper identification of the beedi workers but also in their access to benefits under different schemes.^[6]

Alternative livelihood is a supply reduction measure of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control as per article 17 and 18 that states "Provision of support for economically viable alternative activities" and "Protection of the environment and the health of persons," respectively.^[7] Reduction in the supply of tobacco cannot be

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forced upon beedi rollers as they are dependent on tobacco for their livelihood; however, alternatives can be explored to improve their health and economic condition.

The industry makes huge profits which hardly trickles down to the workers.^[8] Trade unions find it difficult to organize the beedi workers to fight against the manufacturers at the local level. Besides, the workers fear losing the job if they protest against the local employers.^[6] This is more so in the context of insecurity and limited alternate livelihood.

Studies show that most tobacco workers want to shift from their present occupations which have kept them in unending poverty, to safer alternative means of livelihood.^[9,10] At present, most of them work for the tobacco industry as they have no choice due to a lack of skills or other employment opportunities.

It is a challenge to find alternative employment opportunities to beedi rollers which can be done conveniently at home. Furthermore, the educational and skill levels of beedi rollers are very low, and finding alternatives are difficult without improving their skill levels.^[11] Besides, the beedi rollers are getting few financial benefits and health benefits given by the government and companies. Hence, there is a need to formulate appropriate alternate livelihood strategies by considering the opinion of beedi rollers and understanding the current benefits availed by them.

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study was conducted from March 2019 to May 2019 in Udupi district of Karnataka state in southern India after obtaining the institution ethics committee (IEC) approval (IEC: 155/2019). To estimate the proportion of beedi rollers willing to move to alternate vocation, we carried out a pilot study and observed that 22.2% wanted to quit beedi rolling. Subsequently, for a 95% confidence level and relative precision of 20%, the sample size worked out to be 355, and accounting for 5% nonresponse, a minimum of 373 beedi rollers were required to be interviewed. Udupi district has seven blocks and approximately 55 beedi rollers were to be selected from each of the seven blocks, namely Hebri, Kapu, Byndoor, Udupi, Kundapur, Karkala, and Bramhavara. Participants were enrolled into the study and interviewed after obtaining written informed consent. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data that consisted of around 40 questions divided into four categories: personal information, occupation related, benefits received, and alternate livelihood. Survey questions were filled by the interviewer that took approximately 20 min using a predesigned user application developed through Kobo Toolbox. We visited the nearby beedi branches where beedi rolling work is assigned. After contacting beedi rollers at the branch, participants were asked about their suitable date and time to administer the questionnaire either at their residence or in the vicinity where they roll beedi in groups. Snowball sampling technique was used to identify subsequent beedi rollers in a given block till the sample size was met. Privacy

and confidentiality were maintained while interviewing the participants during data collection process.

The analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS version 26 (Bangalore, Karnataka, India). The participants were representative of the Udupi district since the district is divided into seven blocks mentioned above, and we chose an equal sample from each of the blocks. The statistical analysis was conducted using binary logistic regression, and the level of significance was taken as $P \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

A questionnaire survey was done by interviewing 381 beedi rollers with one or more years of experience to collect opinion toward alternate means of livelihood and benefits availed by them. Out of the 381 beedi rollers, 145 (38.1%) were in the age group of 45–54 years, whereas only 47 (12.3%) were below 35 years of age. Three-fourth of the beedi rollers 282 (74.0%) could read or had only primary education, whereas 40 (10.5%) were illiterate and 59 (15.5%) were educated up to high school or preuniversity. A total of 236 (61.9%) respondents' families had more than five members, whereas 145 (38.1%) respondents consisted of <5 members in a family. In the households visited, there were either two or three earning members among 187 (49.0%) and 137 (36.0%) families, respectively, whereas 57 (15.0%) families reported lone earning member with beedi rolling as an occupation.

Work profile of the beedi rollers

Out of 381 respondents, 135 (35.4%) had an experience of 11–20 years in beedi rolling, whereas 148 (38.8%) had an experience of 21 years and above. Each person rolled an average of 500 beedis in a day and 228 (59.8%) rollers spent 3–5 h rolling beedis. Predominantly, 264 (69.3%) responded that they get beedi rolling work for 5–7 days in a week. Further, it was reported that rollers get paid INR 150 for rolling a thousand beedis.

Around 359 (94.2%) beedi rollers said, they receive payment for beedi rolling once in a week, 21 (5.5%) twice a week. Around 341 (89.5%) beedi rollers said that they get timely payment, whereas 40 (10.5%) said that they do not get it on time. Further, 53 (13.9%) workers had complaints about payment cuts, whereas 328 (86.1%) of rollers do not face it as they complete the work within time. The reason quoted for payment cuts was not rolling the expected number of beedis in the supplied raw materials.

Among 381 beedi rollers, 264 (69.3%) felt the absence of security in beedi rolling job in future and 368 (96.6%) were not having any alternative job or income source. This was mainly due to lack of education among 256 (39.3%) study population and age-related factors in 139 (21.4%) rollers, discouraging them from shifting from beedi rolling to another job.

It can be observed that 367 (96.3%) respondents chose beedi rolling as their full-time and 14 (3.7%) as a part-time occupation. Out of 367 full-time beedi rollers, 146 (39.8%) were ready for any other job along with beedi rolling.

Lack of education, higher age, and longer experience in beedi rolling were the main reasons for 283 (74.3%) beedi rollers not to quit beedi rolling. However, alternate livelihood factors included family problems, health issues, not being financially sound, and afraid of losing a beedi rolling job for 98 (26%) beedi rollers.

Awareness and benefits

More than half of the participants, i.e., 226 (59.3%), were not aware of any benefits, which include education, health, cash, and maternity benefits. Out of 155 beedi rollers who were aware of various benefits, 91 (58.7%) received benefits from the government.

Training program

The analysis showed that 243 (63.8%) beedi rollers were aware of the measures taken by the government to control tobacco usage. Two hundred and thirty-seven (62.2%) beedi rollers expressed a need of training to start an alternate job with a preferred training duration of about 30 days, while the location was a nearby Anganwadi center 133 (65.2%) or community center 14 (6.8%), while 53 (26.0%) were not particular of the location of the training.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has initiated a skill development program for beedi workers and their dependents to engage them in alternative jobs/livelihoods for enhancing their income. On enquiring about such initiatives, only 10.2% of the respondents were aware, whereas 7 (1.8%) participants reported that they attended such a skill development program and two respondents expressed to have benefitted from it. One trained person inculcated training program in present work. None of the trained individuals received any financial benefits from the government for implementing a suitable work.

Factors associated with switching job

The objective of this study was to identify the most important factors responsible for switching of beedi rollers from beedi rolling to other alternative means of livelihood. Accordingly, we carried out a binary logistic regression analysis [Table 1].

The willingness to switch job among beedi rollers was significantly associated with the age of the beedi rollers. It was observed that as the age of the beedi rollers increased, the possibility of switching the job decreased, as depicted in Table 1. Similarly, willingness to switch job among beedi rollers was significantly associated with the experience of the beedi rollers. It was observed that beedi rollers whose experience was 1–10 years were 3.1 (1.3, 7.6) times more likely to quit the beedi rolling job, and those with 11–20 years were 3.4 (1.6, 7.2) times more likely to quit in comparison to those with more than 20 years of experience. Among the beedi rollers with 1–10 years' experience, 35.7% expressed an intent to switch to alternate livelihood that among 11–20 years, it was 43 (31.9%); for 21–30 years, it was 19 (15.1%); and more than 30 years' experience, it was 1 (4.5%), respectively ($P < 0.05$). Similarly, total members in the family, deduction in payment, and benefits received from government were significantly

associated with willingness to switch job among the beedi rollers ($P < 0.05$), as shown in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

Beedi workers are getting various benefits from the government.^[2,6,12] The current study shows that less than half of the participants were aware of the benefits given by the government. This is in contrast with another community survey regarding awareness on health and social welfare benefits among beedi workers conducted in three nearby places in a single block, wherein two-thirds (67.5%) of the population were aware.^[2] This observed difference may be because our study area covered the entire Udupi district comprising seven blocks.

Amid economic benefits, the present study explores beedi rollers' opinion toward alternate livelihood in the Udupi district. Many key issues were identified in the current study. Of particular interest is the question of how the skill development initiatives taken by the government might benefit the beedi rollers. Lack of awareness about government programs on alternative livelihoods is a major deterrent. The current study shows that nearly 90% of the respondents are not aware of such initiatives. As per the Government of India report^[3] out of 5,586,623 registered beedi workers in India, only 3620 beedi workers were trained under the skill development program. Four hundred and sixty-one of them shifted to alternate livelihoods. It is a challenge to switch beedi rollers from beedi rolling to other alternate jobs. The government should provide economically sustainable alternatives and continued support till they get established in the new job.

The present study shows that beedi rollers heavily depend on beedi rolling for income generation and employment. Most (96.6%) of the respondents have no alternative sources of income, similar to a study conducted in Uttar Pradesh with 93.4%^[13] and 93.5% in Maharashtra.^[14]

Intermediaries are known to supply beedi rollers with low-quality tendu leaves. They also reject beedis deemed low quality but eventually take them without paying.^[14] Large rate of beedi rejection on the grounds of low quality is a widespread exploitative practice in the industry as they are not judged to be of standard quality by the checker. Besides, no wage is paid for the rejected beedis.^[13] About 13.9% of the respondents complained about the deduction in payment. However, nearly 90% of the respondents said that they receive payments on time.

Major factors discouraging beedi rollers from shifting from beedi rolling to other jobs were higher age and low literacy which accounts for 60.7%. Any alternative livelihood programs introduced by the government should focus on beedi rollers of younger age groups and those with better literacy level.

Considering their dependency on beedi rolling, age, and literacy, it is essential to adopt short-term strategies such

Table 1: Factors associated with switching the occupation

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	Switching job, <i>n</i> (%)	Crude OR (95% CI)	<i>P</i>	Adjusted OR* (95% CI)	<i>P</i>
Age						
≤35	47	16 (34.0)	1	<0.001	1	0.007
36-44	107	44 (41.1)	1.4 (0.7-2.8)		2.9 (1.2-7.1)	
45-54	145	34 (23.4)	0.6 (0.3-1.2)		1.6 (0.6-4.3)	
≥55	82	4 (4.9)	0.1 (0.03-0.3)		0.5 (0.1-2.1)	
Educational status						
Illiterate	40	5 (12.5)	0.2 (0.1-0.5)	<0.001	0.4 (0.1-1.3)	0.041
Primary (1-7 standard) and can read	282	66 (23.4)	0.4 (0.2-0.6)		0.4 (0.2-0.8)	
High school (8-10 standard) and preuniversity (11 and 12)	59	27 (45.8)	1		1	
Total members in the family						
1-4	145	49 (33.8)	1	0.005	1	0.004
≥5	236	49 (20.8)	0.5 (0.3-0.8)		0.4 (0.3-0.8)	
Total children below 15 years						
0	171	38 (22.2)	1	0.342		
1	113	31 (27.4)	1.3 (0.8-2.3)			
≥2	97	29 (29.9)	1.5 (0.8-2.6)			
Earning member in family						
1	57	17 (29.8)	1	0.003		
2	187	60 (32.1)	1.1 (0.6-2.1)			
≥3	137	21 (15.3)	0.4 (0.2-0.9)			
Experience in beedi rolling						
1-10	98	35 (35.7)	3.6 (1.9-6.7)	<0.001	3.1 (1.3-7.6)	0.007
11-20	135	43 (31.9)	3.0 (1.7-5.4)		3.4 (1.6-7.2)	
21 and above	148	20 (13.5)	1		1	
Payment on time						
Yes	341	94 (27.6)	1	0.023		
No	40	4 (10)	0.3 (0.1-0.8)			
Payment deduction						
Yes	53	4 (7.5)	1	0.003	1	0.002
No	328	94 (28.7)	4.9 (1.7-14.0)		6.3 (2.0-20.3)	
Types of beedi rolling job						
Part time	14	4 (28.6)	1	0.804		
Full time	367	94 (25.6)	0.9 (0.3-2.8)			
Aware of any benefits from the government						
Yes	155	58 (37.4)	1	<0.001		
No	226	40 (17.7)	0.4 (0.2-0.6)			
Any benefits received from the government						
Yes	91	48 (52.7)	1	<0.001	1	<0.001
No	290	50 (17.2)	0.2 (0.1-0.3)		0.1 (0.07-0.3)	

* Adjusted for Age, Educational status, Total members in the family, Experience in beedi rolling, Payment deduction, Any benefits received from the government CI: Confidence interval, OR: Odds ratio

as training to beedi rollers, financial and marketing support for the new ventures, and regular supply of raw materials at a subsidized price. It is also essential to see that alternate livelihood must provide beedi rollers with an equal or higher income compared to beedi rolling.

CONCLUSION

Overall observation showed that due to low education levels and higher experience, the beedi rollers were not ready to shift from their jobs to other alternative jobs. Majority of the beedi rollers were aware that shortly they may lose or there will be less

opportunity for beedi rolling. Furthermore, most of the rollers were not aware of the benefits and skill development program offered by the government. Alternative jobs to beedi rolling should generate substantial and sustainable income through market demand, be less technology-intensive, should not require large amounts of investment, and incur low switching cost to the one who wishes to shift to other means of livelihood. The study emphasizes a need for an integrated and viable approach to address the problems of beedi rollers by mainstreaming alternative livelihoods into rural development programs, aimed at the promotion of alternative livelihoods, and local sustainable development.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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