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# Health Ailments of Tea Plantation Workers in Coonoor, The Nilgiris

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## ABSTRACT

**Background**: Every individual worker is entitled to work in an environment where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. Employers are responsible to consult with their employees or their representatives, on health and safety issues. The present study is an attempt to explore the health ailments and availability of health benefits of the tea plantation workers, in Coonoor, Nilgiri District.
**Methodology:** a quantitative research approach with descriptive research design was used in the study. 50 tea estate workers were selected by simple random sampling technique. Prevalence of health ailments and availability of health benefits among tea estate workers were assessed by self-structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics

**Results:** It was observed that the workers are suffering from various disorders like fever, cough, backpain, hypertension, respiratory problems, skin problems, etc. Further, the workers do not show much interest to go to hospital for treatment. The workers are ignorant or are not conscious about personal hygiene and sanitation practices.

**Conclusion:** Health awareness among the tea plantation workers is very poor. Thus, the government as well as the authority of the tea management should consider this serious issue as an integral part of the developmental plan, for equitable and sustainable economic growth of the country.

**Key words:** tea estate, health ailments, benefits, awareness, personal hygiene

## INTODUCTION

Health status is a universal concept that is determined by more than the presence or absence of any disease. It is often summarized by life expectancy or self-assessed health status, and more broadly includes measures of functioning, physical illness and mental wellbeing. Health is defined as the ability to adopt and self-manage physical, mental and social challenges throughout life. According to World Health Organization, Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Physical is about body. Mental is about how people think and feel. To understand the occupational aspects of health, it is necessary to have a detailed examination of workers in terms of the actual work involved: the number of hours allotted, the remuneration if any, inadequate wages, work environment and the effects of all these on their nutritional status as well as on their physical and mental health. It is necessary to analyze the types of physical stress experienced.

 

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**Health ailments faced by tea plantation workers**

Through discussion with the estate workers the five major health ailments were identified among the sample workers. They are continuous cough/dry cough, low blood pressure/high blood pressure neck pain/shoulder pain, Respiratory and skin problems,

Continuous Cough/ Dry Cough**: A** constant cough is one that interferes with our day to day routine, or keeps us from getting a proper night's rest. It may be hard to catch our breath. It may lead to vomiting. It may also lead to feeling totally exhausted. Coughing can clearly get in the way and disturbs when we need to speak on the job. Dry cough is a type of cough which does not cause any mucus or phlegm. It is closely associated with tickly coughs and often, these terms are used interchangeably. Both dry coughs and tickly coughs are called as non-productive coughs, as distinct from chesty coughs where mucus is produced. A dry cough is often the result of infection by cold and flu viruses. It can also be triggered by atmospheric pollutants (such as cigarette smoke) which irritate the throat. In most of these situations, dry coughs occur because the back of throat (or pharynx) becomes irritated or inflamed. Low Blood Pressure / High Blood Pressure: Low blood pressure or hypo-tension, is a condition in which blood pressure becomes so low enough that the flow of blood to the organs of the body is inadequate and symptoms and/or signs of low blood flow develop. High blood pressure a condition in which the force of the blood against the artery walls is too high. High blood pressure is often associated with few or no symptoms. Neck Pain / Shoulder Pain: Neck pain is a common problem; many people experience neck pain at some point in their lives. any abnormalities, inflammation, or injury can cause neck pain or stiffness. Shoulder pain, Pain in the shoulder are due to injuries or diseases. Pain also arise from the shoulder joint itself or from any of the many surrounding muscles, ligaments or tendons. Pain might also arise in the shoulder from diseases and conditions that involves the shoulder joint, the soft tissues and bones surrounding the shoulder, or the nerves that supply sensation to the shoulder area. Respiratory ailments: Respiratory disease encompasses pathological conditions affecting the organs and tissues that make gas exchange possible in higher organisms, and includes conditions of the upper respiratory tract, trachea, bronchi, and the nerves and muscles of respiration. Respiratory diseases range from mild and self-limiting, such as the common cold, to life-threatening entities like bacterial pneumonia, pulmonary embolism, and lung cancer. The plantation workers faced three common types of respiratory problems, they are Asthma, Sinus and Head Ache. Skin Diseases: A disease affecting the skin. A skin condition is also known as cutaneous condition. It can have a severe impact on a person's day-to-day life, crush self-confidence, movement, lead to depression and even ruin relationships. At its most severe, it can even kill. It's an issue that needs to be dealt with, seriously. In the tea estate, the work environment creates some skin diseases to the workers. The researcher identified three types of skin diseases commonly among the sample respondents. They are Itching in skin, Skin Boils and Skin Lesion's.

**Literature Review**

There is quite an extensive literature on the health condition of the tea plantation workers. However, not many studies are available on health aspects of tea plantation workers in Nilgiris. An intensive study was done by Medhi et al. (2006) on health problems and nutritional status of tea garden population of Assam. The study highlighted high incidence of under nutrition and infectious diseases among the tea garden population. Poor economic condition and unhygienic living conditions make the tea garden population vulnerable to

 

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various communicable diseases and malnutrition. The study highlighted prevalence of under nutrition among children (59.9%), thinness among adults, worm infections (65.4%), skin infection, tuberculosis, back pain and micronutrient deficiency disorders like anemia were widespread among the tea garden laborers. The study also revealed positive impact of individual's education on health and nutrition.

Deb, Hazarika et al. (2006) pointed the prevalence of hypertension among the tea garden workers, which is emerging as a major health problem in India. Blood pressure was measured using a standardized technique. Chi-square analysis was used to test for the association of potential risk factors with hypertension. The study pointed that the prevalence of hypertension among tea garden workers was large (60%). Intake of alcohol, consumption of extra salt in food and beverages, and habit of taking tobacco were found to be the risk factors for hypertension. The independent determinants of hypertension were age, gender, consumption of locally prepared alcohol, and intake of extra salt. Gender-specified and age-stratified analysis showed the association of increased risk of hypertension with intake of tobacco in women only, while consumption of locally prepared alcohol was an important risk factor for hypertension in both men and women.

Mahanta et al. (2006) found that a high rate of alcohol and tobacco intake was found among the tea industry workers, who had no formal education or were school dropouts, and the parents were illiterate. An in-depth cross-sectional study was conducted to assess tobacco and alcohol use among tea garden workers of Assam. 650 plantation youths were interviewed using pre-designed and pretested questionnaire. The study revealed the prevalence of alcohol consumption among the youth, 32.2% (43.9% males, 24.6% females). About 59% of respondents had no formal education. The smoking rate was only 2.2%. Hence, 52.9% of the studied population used non-smoked tobacco (56.9% males, 49.6% females). The study explains that working, as a manual worker in the tea industry is significantly associated with higher rate of alcohol and tobacco intake.

Mittal and Srivastava (2006) conducted a study to identify the food intake and diet-related practices, as well as the nutritional status of the Oraon tribal group working in a tea garden of New Mal in Jalpaiguri District. The study evaluated the effect of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and showed that the diet of all Oroan groups was deficient in all food groups. 500 Oroan tribals were surveyed for their dietary intake by 24 h recall and semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire methodology and anthropometry, and description of food-related tradition. The study reveals that the Oraon have poor knowledge and awareness about health and nutrition as well as family planning programs, the children were severely undernourished. In contrast, men and women had adequate BMI even though their energy intake as percentage of RDA was approximately the same as that of children.

Hariharan and Siva Kumar (2014) studied the poor working condition of women tea labourers of Kerala. The researchers found that the labourers were not aware of the medical facilities which had to be provided by the management. Hence a huge number of victims suffered from water borne and air borne diseases and also from malnutrition. The authors suggest that the management take measures in reducing health issues of the tea labourers in order to make the work efficient and standardized.

 

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Aim of the study is to explore the health ailments and the health benefits available for the tea plantation workers in Coonoor, The Nilgiris. The main objectives of the study are to understand the socio demographic profile of tea plantation workers**,** to identify the health ailments of tea plantation workers**,** to know the level of satisfaction towards the health benefits provided by plantation and to give relevant suggestions for the betterment of the workers. Hypothesis was framed to identify whether there is relationship between the age of the respondents and their health ailments and also to identify the difference between gender of the respondents and their health ailments. **Research design:** Descriptive research attempts to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. In this study the researcher aims to describe about the socio demographic profile, health ailments, and health benefits of tea plantation workers and hence the researcher adopted descriptive research design for this study. Universe of the study are the workers who are working at high field tea estate Coonoor, The Nilgiris. The researcher used Simple Random Sampling to select the respondents for the study. The size of the sample is 50 out of the total 134 workers. The researcher used self-structured questionnaire consists of questions pertaining to workers personal data, health problems, health benefits. The researcher collected both primary and secondary data for the study. The primary data required for the study were collected directly from the respondents by using interview method. A vital amount of Secondary data was collected from various sources like books, journals, magazines, articles, published data and e-material. The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Figure I**

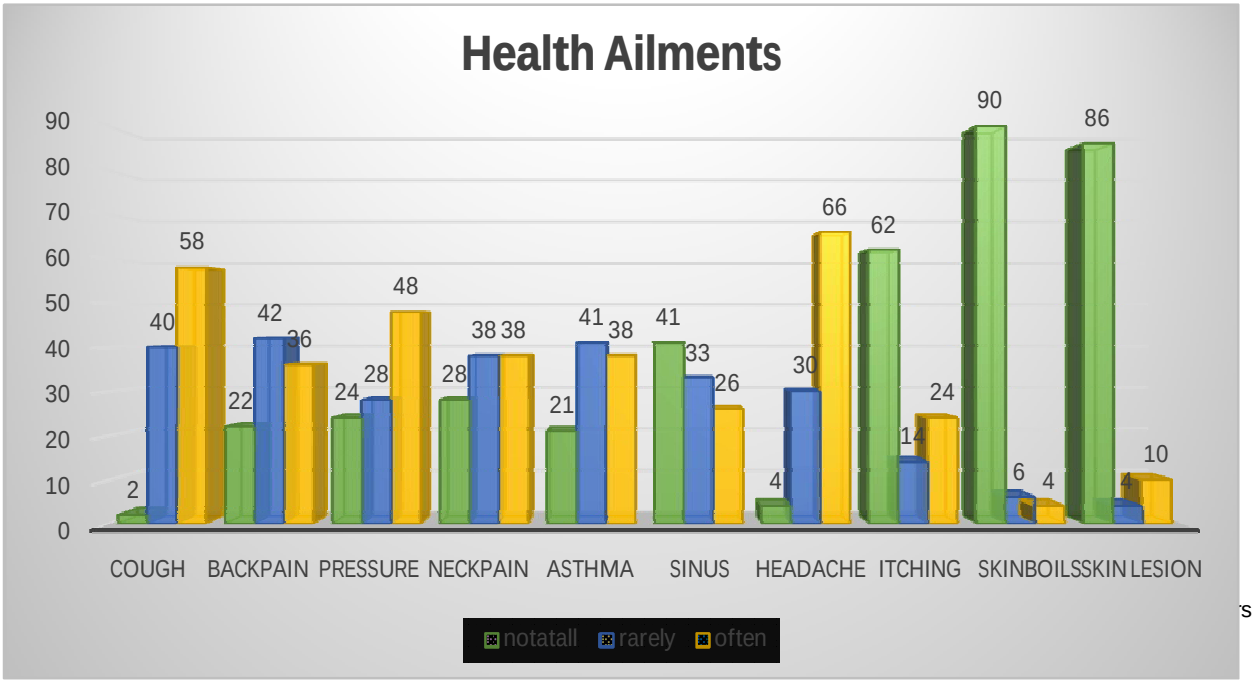

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Figure I depict the various health ailments faced by the tea plantation workers.

Based on the findings of the study 58.0 per cent of sample workers often suffered by Continuous Cough/ Dry Cough, due to working in Cold Climate, because the weather condition in Nilgiris continued to be in the grip of cold.36.0 percent of workers often suffered from back pain due to standing for a longer time regularly. 38.0 per cent felt Neck Pain/Shoulder Pain by way of work in a monotonous way, plucking the leaves and carrying the tea leaf bags by bending their neck or shoulder for a long time regularly. The work pressure leads to High Blood Pressure/ Low Blood Pressure by sample workers which accounts for 48 per cent. On the whole, 94.60 per cent of sample workers suffered by different types of health issues.

Regarding respiratory problems 38.0 per cent of sample workers affected by asthma due to damp weather. 26.0 per cent of workers suffered by sinus without knowing them.66.0 percent of worker's suffered by severe Head Ache in work time, because work in a cool weather. It is also pinpointed that, the sample respondents did not aware of their typical respiratory problems which they suffered in the work environment exactly. The researcher analyzed the respiratory problems and categorized into three common problems as mentioned above, with the help of symptoms felt by sample workers while work in the tea estate.

The major skin diseases felt by the sample respondents are Itching or allergic in their skin due to use of more chemicals in the production process. were 24.00 per cent of sample workers pointed that they often have allergies. 4.0 per cent workers often suffer by skin boils. Skin Leisons found often in 10.0 percent of the workers respectively. It is found that, itching in the skin is the main skin disease among the sample respondents.

Regarding the level of satisfaction towards health benefits 58.0 percent of sample respondents are satisfied with the first aid facility provided in the garden hospital. Regarding treatment facility 60.0 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the treatment provided in Hospital. It is inferred that 66.0 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the sick leave benefits, if a person is affected by some disease, to cure or to get recover from their illness. Regarding Sickness Allowance majority 66.0 percent of the respondent's response were neutral, which highlights the respondents are not much satisfied with the allowance provided.

The hypothesis was tested using Karl Pearson's correlation to find out the relationship between the variables and the result reveals that there is significant relationship between age and health ailments and also it was found that there is significant difference between gender and health afflictions using t test.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Investigation about the tea plantation workers health status reveals certain important fact, that no workers irrespective of age and sex were willing to visit doctor or hospital in case of minor ailments like fever, headache, stomach problem, cough and cold, skin diseases, and so on. When they become incapacitated or unable to do any work, then it was considered to be a disease for them. Further the researcher would like to give few suggestions and recommendations after doing the study the researcher felt that the workers are not much

 

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satisfied with their sickness allowance provided by the management which need to be increased. The management should adhere to all statutory health measures as guaranteed by the plantation labour act 1951.Health care facilities can be further improved in estate. More health practitioners, should be appointed to promote the maternal and child health as well as general health. The management should conduct health awareness camps and periodic health checkup for the plantation workers. Rehabilitation of sick and care for the disabled plantation workers must be provided by the authorities of the tea estate.

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