

**The issue of absenteeism among the working community- a study in
plantation sector**

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Abstract

In the production process Human Resources plays a vital role. This is because of its capacity to control and coordinate the other two resources namely material, money. The most important unique feature of the man power is that it is the only live component. Hence the absence of work force makes a significant difference in the production process. Due to absenteeism, productivity may reduce and it may adversely affect the stability of the organization. The problem of absenteeism affects not only the industry but also the employees and their families. Here it should be noted that in the developed countries Industrial absenteeism is not that severe problem mainly because of mechanization and automation but in the third world countries like India Absenteeism is one of the serious issue, the main thing is that Indian plantation sector is mostly depend on man power. This study analyses the causes of absenteeism in the plantation sector in selected tea plantations in Kerala.

Key words: Human resource, Productivity, Stability, Industrial absenteeism

Introduction

India is placed at the first position among the tea producers of the world with the state of Assam and Kerala contribute the lion share of total tea production in India. The eastern rages Kerala occupies the tea plantations under organized and unorganized sectors, employ a large number of workers from local area and from the boarder of neighboring states. Several numbers of workers of varied background are employed in these plantations. The workforce thus plays a major role in affecting the economy. One of the common issues in this respect is absenteeism amongst the working class. Absenteeism is the failure of employees to report for work when they are scheduled to work. Employees who are away from work on recognized holidays, vacations, approved leaves of absence, or approved leaves of absence would not be included. "Absenteeism means workers may remain absent from the regular work due to hard nature of jobs, monotony in the work and personal reasons. It is a normal and natural tendency among the factory workers" (B R Sharma)

The labour composition has a major impact on the increase of the rate of absenteeism among the workers. The data on absenteeism can often be a meaningful indicator of the degree of the adjustment and commitment of the workers in the industrial work. All absents from work can not be regarded as absenteeism. It is essential to know that what workers do by remaining absent. (R.K.Kar, 1984)

The absence may be due to personal problems, sickness, sickness of family members, or any other reason. Some time workers remain absent only to work elsewhere for higher wages. Absenteeism is a habitual pattern of absence from a duty or obligation. Traditionally, absenteeism has been viewed as an indicator of poor individual performance, as well as a breach of an implicit contract between employee and employer; it was seen as a management problem, and framed in economic or quasi-economic terms. (Johns, 2007)

The causes of absenteeism are many and include serious accidents and illness, low morale, boredom on the job, lack of job satisfaction, inadequate leadership and poor supervision, Personal problems (financial, marital, substance abuse, childcare eldercare etc. Poor physical

fitness, inadequate nutrition, transportation problems, the availability of income protection plans, stress, excessive workload. Absenteeism may have repercussions at production, financial and administrative level. Decrease in Productivity may happen due to employees forced to carry an extra workload, or supporting new or replacement staff, provision of training and orientate new or replacement workers etc. This in turn affects staff morale and employee service. Absenteeism demands overtime or agency cost for replacement workers thus causing financial blows on the employer including the cost of self-insured income protection plans. At administrative level staff time is required to secure replacement employees or to re-assign the remaining employees and to maintain and control absenteeism.

The problem absenteeism is a universal fact. It often affects the production of commodities and also the supply. The absenteeism can be divided as authorized and unauthorized absenteeism. In the authorized absenteeism the employee notifies the reasons at a reasonable time to the supervisors. The percentage of woman workers and that of seasonal labour are more in the smaller and relatively less organized plantation. Possible reasons for this may be the lesser participation of women in union activities and that a smaller plantation involves lesser amount of cash outlay for labour.

The present study intended for identifying and assessing the factors which responsible for the increased rate of absenteeism in this plantation.

Methodology

The major objective of the study was 1) to understand the extent of absenteeism in a sample of workforce in the proposed research universe; the estate workers in the selected estates of Harrison Malayalam Limited, 2) to study the causes of absenteeism amongst the workforce and 3) to give suggestions from the view of a professional social worker based on the study.

This descriptive study has used purposive sampling and out of all workers, 300 workers were taken as sample for the study. An interview schedule specially designed for the study was used as tool for collecting the data. Besides this, some qualitative data were documented based on observation.

In the first phase of the study, based on a background data, the existing rate of absenteeism was analyzed for identifying the patterns in different organizations, sectors and demographic groups. The results showed major differences in the regulations and in the way these were applied, between as well as within the plantation sector. In the second phase, based on a structural schedule, data were collected from different classes of workers on the circumstances and occasions they themselves refrain from workplace. Although the methodological deficits and difficulties were evident, the report highlights the causes and costs of absenteeism for different class of workers in the Vandiperiyar(Kerala) group of estates. The study focus on the strategies to address the causes of absenteeism. They also include a composite review of absenteeism and measures to reduce its rates in the plantation sector.

Results and Discussion

The primary aim of the research study was to study the absenteeism among the employees in the selected estates of Vandiperiyar Group of Estates, Kumily, Kerala. The study limited to a sample of 300 respondents. The major findings are listed below.

The respondents were classified into three age groups in which the majority was in the age group 40-50 years. The sex and age were considered for the study. Majority were females(89.66%). And 99% of the respondents were married. The study mainly confined to the inquiry of the major situations of employees, which causes them to get away from work. There are a number factors which contributes for absenteeism among the employees of this plantation. From the analysis and interpretation of the available data collected, the investigators put forward the findings of the study.

When considering the overall satisfaction level, it is found that 84 % of the respondents were highly satisfied with the conditions of work like wages, supervision, welfare facilities, superiors, co-workers and Housing. Still an existing rate of absenteeism 27% was observed inspite of high level of satisfaction amongst the workers.

Majority of the respondents (90.4%) are belonging to the category of “**pluckers** “and only a meager portion (9.6%) are general workers.

Considering the case of employee whom **own land property**, 28 % tend to absent from work for doing odd job in their own property. The major works are that of farming and construction of house. The major farming crops of the workers are cardamom, pepper, coffee etc. some of the respondents were having construction of house in their property

When self-business is taken as areason, only 2% were found to be having self-business. But this is only a minor part of the absenteeism percentage. Among respondents with self-business activity, only minor percentages (2%) of employees are absent from duty for engaging self-business.

Absenting from work for children education is found to be a big reason. Almost 58% of employees were having school going children are in the habit being absent from the work. The major educational purposes are admission, transfer, parents’ teachers meetings, school visits. Majority of the employees send their children to Tamil Nadu for education, they visit their child at least once in a week. This contributed to increase the gravity of the problem of absenteeism.

Health issues of self and family becomes the major reason for which the respondents absent themselves from the work. Almost 90% of the respondents were having health issues either self or family. The major health issue is joint pain (arthritis), fever, cold etc. Some of the respondents were having lifestyle diseases like diabetics and blood pressure (Hypertension). As the majority of the respondents are females, when a family member got sick she is forced to stay back at home and take leave.

Maternity reason for self and family found to be a cause of absenteeism for very negligible number of respondents.

Considering **Accidents both during job and not during job**, it is quite interesting to find out that only negligible number of people met accidents. In the case of accidents, they avail authorized leave and the company looks after their needs.

Religious activities also play role in increasing absenteeism rate. Among the respondents majority were Hindus followed by Christian and only very less number were Muslims and it is seen that almost 58.3% takes unauthorized leaves for religious related activities. This may be for pilgrimage, weekly prayers, poojas and visits to temples.

House hold work is also a major issue. It is seen that a good number (77.47%) of the respondents take unauthorized leave for this purpose.

Attending **outside work** is another reason for absenteeism . 97 % of respondents, who go out for some other odd jobs, were taking unauthorized leave.

Many of the workers commented that they become lazy on some days and stay back at home- the reason for the laziness was reported as the long distance between the work spot and the estate line. Bad weather also contributed to this.

A major percentage (90.6%) of people become absent because of the reasons like marriage, death, visits to relatives etc. Majority of the employees are migrated from Tamilnadu. A marriage or a death of any relative, force them to go to the native place and it takes on an average of 3-to-4 days to return to work. In the 'estate lines' an average 2-4 marriages occur in a month. This also becomes the reason for absenteeism.

The majority (89.66%) of the respondents are female and only 10% of respondents are male. It shows that organization employ more females workers than male.

It is clear that, 45.6% of the respondents are belongto the age group of (41-50 years) and 34% of the respondent s are young (20-40 years). Only 20.3% are above 50 years. It shows that majority of workers are in their middle age and below.

The majority of the respondents (90.4%) are belonging to the category of "**pluckers** "and only a meager portion (9.6%) are general workers.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BASED ON THE LEAVE TYPE AVAILED

Type of leave/reasons	SL		AL		UL		SL&AL		AL&UL		SL&UL		SL&AL&UL	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Own land (N=85)	5	5.8	29	34.1	75	88.2	3	3.5	21	24.7	2	2.3	1	1.7
Self-business (N=6)	0	0	1	16.6	5	83.3	0	0	1	16.6	0	0	0	0
Children education (N=174)	12	6.8	129	74.1	161	92.4	10	5.7	107	61.4	2	1.1	6	3.4
Health issue self (N=269)	26	9.6	263	97.7	253	94.5	23	8.5	224	83.2	2	0.7	17	6.3
Health issue family (N=282)	21	7.4	198	70.2	244	86.5	17	6.2	159	56.3	1	0.3	12	4.2
Maternity (N=30)	0	0	14	46.6	19	63.3	0	0	11	36.6	0	0	0	0
Workspot accident (N=38)	7	18.4	35	92.1	11	28.9	5	13.1	9	23.6	1	2.6	1	2.6
Accident not during job (N=17)	0	0	15	88.2	7	41.1	0	0	6	2	0	0	0	0
Union (N =61)	0	0	10	16.3	55	90.1	0	0	4	6.5	0	0	0	0
Religion (N	15	13.3	83	74.1	65	58.0	5	4.4	86	76.7	4	3.5	1	0.8

=112)														
Household work (n=111)	12	10.8	70	63.6	86	77.4	9	8.1	35	31	1	0.9	2	1.8
Outside work (N =41)	3	7.3	1	2.4	40	97.5	0	0	0	0	3	7.3	0	0
Addiction (N =5)	0	0	1	20	4	80	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0
Laziness (N =46)	0	0	0	0	46	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Any other (N =278)	15	5.3	149	53.5	252	90.6	3	1.7	127	45.6	9	3.2	3	1.7

(SL = STATUTORY LEAVE AL= AUTHORISED LEAVE UL= UNAUTHORISED LEAVE)

From the above table, it is clear that 88.2% of the respondents with own land take unauthorized leave for working in their own land. Another 34.1% avail authorized leave, and only 5.8% avail statutory leave for the same purpose. 24.7% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together.

From the above table a little more than 3/4th of the respondents (83.3) having own business was found to be taking UL. Another 16.6 % was found to be taking AL. Also, 16.6 % respondents indicated that they take both AL & UL.

From the above table it is understood that, 92.5% of the respondents take unauthorized leave and 74.1% of the respondents take authorized leave, 6.8% avail statutory leave for the purpose of meeting the demands of school going children. 61.4% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together.

It means that majority of the respondents take unauthorised leave for meeting the needs of their school going children.

From the above table it is understood that 97.7% of the respondents having health issue take authorised leave while 94.5% take unauthorised leave. Only 9.6% of the respondents take statutory leave. 83.2% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together. Only very less number of respondents takes the other combinations.

From the above table it is clear that among the respondents 86.5% takes unauthorized leave, 70.2% takes authorized leave (AL) and 7.4% takes statutory leave. 56.3% of respondents take both authorized and unauthorised leave. 6.2% takes both SL and AL. 4.2% of the respondents take statutory, authorised and unauthorised leave together.

It is concluded that majority of the respondents' takes unauthorized leave.

From the above table it is understood that 63.3% of the respondents have maternity reason' takes unauthorised leave, 46.6% takes authorized leave and 36.6% of the respondents take both authorized and unauthorized leave.

It means, majority of the respondents takes unauthorised leave for this purpose.

The above table shows that, among the 'respondents met with work spot accident', 92.1% avail authorised leave, 28.9% takes unauthorized, 23.6% takes both authorized and unauthorized leave together, 18.4% avail statutory leave for this purpose and 13.1% of the respondents take both statutory and authorised leave together.

So it can be concluded that majority (92.1%) of the respondents avail authorised leave for this purpose.

The above table depicts that 88.2% among the respondents who met with accident "during out of the course of job." takes authorised leave while 41.1% takes unauthorised leave. Only 2% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together.

This point out that majority of the respondents takes authorised leave for accidents occurring during out of the course of job.

From the above table it is clear that among the respondents having union activities, 90.16% takes unauthorised leave while 16.39% of the respondents avail authorised leave. Only 6.5% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together.

It is concluded that majority (90.16%) of respondents takes unauthorized leave for union activities. The above table shows that among the respondents with religious activities, 76.8% takes authorized and unauthorized leave together. 74.1% takes only authorised leave for this purpose, 58.3% takes unauthorised leave and 13.3% of the respondents take statutory leave. 3.57% of the total respondents take both statutory and unauthorised leave. Only 0.89% of the respondents take all the statutory, authorised and unauthorised leave together.

It means majority (74.10%, 76.78%) of the respondents takes authorised and unauthorized leave together.

The above table show that among the respondents having household work 77.4% take unauthorised leave, 63.6% take authorised leave and 10.8% take statutory leave for doing household work. 31% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together while 8.1% takes both statutory and authorised leave for household works. Only very less number of respondents takes the other combinations of leave. \

This table shows that among the respondents who have some outside work, 97.5% take unauthorised leave for outside employment. 7.31% of the respondents take statutory leave and 2.4% takes authorised leave for this purpose. 7.3% of the respondents take statutory and unauthorised leave together for outside employment.

It can be concluded that majority (97.5%) of the respondents take unauthorised leave.

From the table above it is understood that among the respondents have some habit of substance abuse , 80% take unauthorised leave, while 20% take only authorised leave and 20% of the respondents take authorised and unauthorised leave together.

This shows majority (80%) of the respondents (alcoholic) take unauthorised leave.

From the above table it is clear that among the respondents with any other activities like marriage, death, visits etc 90% takes unauthorised leave, 53.5% take authorised leave and 45.6% of the respondents take both authorised and unauthorised leave together. 5.3% of the respondents take statutory leave while 3.2% of the respondents take both statutory as well as unauthorised leave together. Only 1.7% of respondents avail statutory, authorised and unauthorised leave together. And the same number of people takes statutory and authorised leave together. This shows that majority (90.6%) of the 'respondents with any other activity' take unauthorised leave.

Limitation of the study

The study may have had limitations like some employees do not wish to disclose the truth due to personal reasons which reduce the extent of availability of details.

Suggestions for curbing the issue

These are some of the suggestions for improving the present condition:

- Avail alternative livelihood
- Transportation facilities- (work spot to lines)
- Company cooperative society- (food grains-----)
- Salary though Back account (increases saving)
- Make them aware about all the benefits they are availed with
- Reduce work load
- Provide periodical increment in the wages.
- Health center that could be easily accessed.
- Implementing some system of financial help for emergency

Conclusion

It is said that absenteeism is a 'Silent Killer' in the plantation sector. From this study, it is revealed that health issue and social needs are the main causes of increase in absenteeism. Attendance improvement programs can work! What the employees require is commitment and support from all levels of management, an effective attendance record-keeping system, consultation and open communication on the reasons for the attendance program.

The high rate of absenteeism among the employees of any organization is evidently the lack of commitment on the point of the employees. The commitment is related to the morale level in the organization. A number of causes were identified from the present study. Absenteeism can be categorized under work related and personal causes.

Absenteeism is also encouraged due to the lenient policy of management (Myers 1974). There are other reasons that they take period of time off from work to visit their home village for a variety of reasons. Sickness and social or religious reasons are mainly identified as occasion for absence. The major findings of the study revealed that the prime causes of absenteeism are illness of employees or his family members. The employee remained absent because once a person is facing an immediate need, he/ she goes for other paid jobs. This advantage outweighed the disadvantaged. This is irrespective of the different type of causes, a worker who finds job satisfaction in his work environment is less likely to be absent. It will be noticed that highest rate of absenteeism is in the plantation industry followed by cotton industry (Journal NILM).

Traditional methods of absenteeism control exclusively utilizing disciplinary procedures have proven to be ineffective. It is almost impossible to create a fair disciplinary procedure, because even well run disciplinary systems, are usually seen as unfair. Discipline alone neither identifies nor addresses the root causes of absenteeism. Unless a management attendance program identifies and addresses the causes of employee absenteeism, it will be ineffective and viewed as unfair. A better wage policy will have great impact on controlling the rate of absenteeism based on number of causes.

The study may have had limitations like some employees do not wish to disclose the truth due to personal reasons which reduce the extent of availability of details.

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