

## **Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Cashew Industry of Kollam**

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### **Abstract**

Cashew processing units in India are found largely in Kollam district of Kerala and the city is known as the world's cashew trading capital. Cashew processing units are famed for employing large number of workers and the role they play in enhancing the social and economic status of the women in the society. Thus, this sector made a large number of women workers financially independent, which helped them to contribute to the daily expenses of the household and also to meet the family's financial goals. This also enhanced the social status of the women workers by making them responsible and capable of taking their own decisions with regard to the family matters. Recently, due to many external and internal factors the activities in the cashew industries show a declining trend in Kollam because of relocation of cashew units to other locations to other states. This study aims to find the impact of declining activity in cashew processing units on the social and economic conditions of women workers in Kollam.

**Keywords:** cashew, socio-economic status, women workers

### **1. Introduction**

Kollam, the cashew capital of India houses many cashew processing units which flourished till the first half of the present decade. Cashew processing industry plays an important role in economic growth of women which has a significant impact on financial status of their households. Both public and private sector companies operate in cashew processing industry in Kerala, but private sector companies are the major market players when it comes to global market. Cashew processing industry in Kollam enabled women to be economically independent and thus made them more empowered in the society. Cashew industries include a large number of women which had a positive effect in the social structure by strengthening the position of women in the society. Women's economic empowerment gave them control over their lives and worthwhile participation in the economic decision-making in their own households. Employment in the cashew processing units contributed to the growth of local economy and reduced gender based gap in the society. Due to various internal and external factors there is a crisis in the cashew processing industry in Kollam and it has negatively affected the lives of many women workers earlier employed in the sector. This has resulted in job loss for thousands of workers from the low echelons of the society. The crisis has aggravated the financial crisis of women employed in the industry and their social status in the society.

Various factors which precipitated the cashew crisis are:

1. Insufficient raw cashew nuts
2. Low quality of raw cashew nuts
3. Unscientific plantation management and low productivity

4. Lack of access to high yielding cashew varieties
5. Lack of skilled labour for processing
6. High salary and huge operating costs

This study aims to find the impact of the frequent layoffs and closures of the units on the social and economical life of the cashew nut processing workers.

### 2. Objectives of the Study

1. To find the impact of the crisis in cashew industry over the social status of women workers
2. To find the impact of the crisis in cashew industry over the economic status of women workers
3. To assess the impact of the cashew crisis in the socio-economic life of workers.

### 3. Methodology

The data for the study was collected from women workers who lost their job in cashew processing units and are trying to find other sources of employment. The survey was conducted among 100 workers based on random sampling method. Questionnaire was the primary tool for data collection.

Hypothesis framed for the study are:

1. There is no significant difference in the level of social status between experienced and fresh workers.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of economic status between experienced and fresh workers.

### 4. Tools for Analysis

**Table 1** Age of the Respondents

| Sl.No. | Age          | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|--------|--------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1.     | Below 30     | 22                 | 22         |
| 2.     | 30-40        | 30                 | 30         |
| 3.     | 41-50        | 39                 | 39         |
| 4.     | 51 and above | 9                  | 9          |
|        | Total        | 100                | 100        |

From the Table1 it can be seen that out of the 100 respondents 39 were in the age range of 41 to 50, while 30 of them were in between the age of 30 and 40. When 22 of them were aged below 30, 9 among them were above the age of 50.

**Table 2** Marital Status of the Participants

| Sl.No. | Age       | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| 1.     | Married   | 82                 | 82         |
| 2.     | Unmarried | 14                 | 14         |
| 3.     | Widowed   | 4                  | 4          |
|        | Total     | 100                | 100        |

It can be seen from the Table 2 that 82 of the respondents who participated in the survey were married and 14 were unmarried. 4 of them were widowed.

**Table 3** Income of the Participants

| Sl.No. | Annual Income | No. of respondents | Percentage |
|--------|---------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1.     | Below 60000   | 35                 | 35         |
| 2.     | 60001-80000   | 43                 | 43         |

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|----|-------------|-----|-----|
| 3. | Above 80000 | 22  | 22  |
|    | Total       | 100 | 100 |

From the Table3 it becomes clear that there is a huge difference in the income of workers. While 35 of them received an annual income below Rs. 60,000 , 43 of them earned an annual income between a sum of Rs. 60,000 and Rs. 80,000. Among the 100 participants, 22 workers earned more than Rs.80,000 annually.

**Table 4** Experience of the Participants

| Sl.No. | Experience in Years | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|--------|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1.     | Below 10            | 21                 | 21         |
| 2.     | 11 - 20             | 32                 | 32         |
| 3.     | 21- 30              | 35                 | 35         |
| 4.     | Above 30            | 11                 | 11         |

Table 4 gives the summary of the experience of workers who participated in the study. Majority of the workers who participated have 21 to 30 years of experience in the industry and 32 of them have an experience between 11 and 20 years. While 21 of them were below 10 years of experience, 11 of them were working in the industry for more than 30 years.

### 5.Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the level of social status between experienced and fresh workers.

**Table 4**

|                  | Experienced |       | Less Experienced |      | ANOVA   |       | MANOVA  |       |
|------------------|-------------|-------|------------------|------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
|                  | Mean        | S. D. | Mean             | S.D. | F       | Sig . | F       | Sig . |
| Health           | 3.35        | 1.46  | 2.13             | 0.83 | 167.367 | 0.000 | 467.730 | 0.000 |
| Social Relations | 3.76        | 0.96  | 2.17             | 0.57 | 258.155 | 0.000 |         |       |
| Participation    | 3.13        | 1.32  | 1.38             | 0.73 | 146.579 | 0.000 |         |       |
| Safety           | 2.98        | 0.68  | 2.18             | 0.38 | 88.612  | 0.000 |         |       |
| Happiness        | 3.49        | 1.22  | 1.35             | 0.40 | 405.877 | 0.000 |         |       |
| Confidence       | 3.14        | 1.34  | 1.00             | 0.00 | 447.327 | 0.000 |         |       |

A high mean score of 3.35 for health means incidence of more health problems in experienced workers. A significance value less than .05 means there is significant difference in the occurrence of health problems between experienced and less experienced workers. A high mean score of 3.76 for social relations means experienced workers are socially more connected and a significant value of less than .05 goes to mean that there is significant difference in the social relations between experienced and less experienced workers. Similarly a relatively high mean score of 3.13 for participation means experienced workers participate more in their social roles and a significant value less than .05 means that there is significant difference in the social participation of experienced and less experienced workers in their life. Regarding the safety factor even though the mean score is less, a significant value less than .05 means the existence of significant difference between the workers with respect to the safety aspect of their life. A high mean score for happiness among experienced workers means that they are overall fulfilled their responsibilities as they are relatively aged. A significant value less than 0.05 means that there is significant difference in the happiness factor between experienced and less experienced

workers. From the mean score it can be inferred that the experienced workers are more confident in their life than others and a significant value of less than .05 means that there is significant difference in the confidence of experienced and less experienced workers in their life. As the significance value MANOVA is less than .05 it can be concluded that the differences between the means are statistically significant.

Null Hypothesis is rejected.

Result: There is significant difference in the level of social status between experienced and less experienced cashew workers.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the level of economic status between experienced and fresh workers.

**Table 5**

|              | Experienced |      | Less Experienced |      | ANOVA   |       | MANOVA  |       |
|--------------|-------------|------|------------------|------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
|              | Mean        | S.D. | Mean             | S.D. | F       | Sig.  | F       | Sig.  |
| Housing      | 3.46        | 1.42 | 2.32             | 0.85 | 169.407 | 0.000 | 475.713 | 0.000 |
| Medical Care | 3.69        | 0.89 | 2.05             | 0.47 | 245.135 | 0.000 |         |       |
| Education    | 3.28        | 1.22 | 1.03             | 0.79 | 146.769 | 0.000 |         |       |
| Savings      | 2.87        | 0.73 | 2.29             | 0.33 | 87.502  | 0.000 |         |       |
| Food Choice  | 2.41        | 1.19 | 2.83             | 0.48 | 402.875 | 0.000 |         |       |
| Debt         | 3.19        | 1.41 | 1.48             | 0.50 | 437.217 | 0.000 |         |       |

A high mean score of 3.46 for housing means experienced workers are spending more on housing than less experienced workers. A significance value less than .05 means there is significant difference in the spending for housing between experienced and less experienced workers. A high mean score of 3.69 for medical means experienced workers are spending more on medical related reasons and a significant value of less than .05 goes to mean that there is significant difference in the medical expenses between experienced and less experienced workers. Similarly a relatively high mean score of 3.128 for education means experienced workers spend more for education in their family and a significant value less than .05 means that there is significant difference in the expenditure on education of experienced and less experienced workers in their life. Regarding the savings factor even though the mean score is less, a significant value less than .05 means the existence of significant difference between the workers with respect to the savings aspect of their life. A low mean score for food choice among experienced workers means that they are not having a balanced nutrition same as the less experienced workers. A significant value less than 0.05 means that there is significant difference in the choice of food factor between experienced and less experienced workers. From the mean score it can be inferred that the experienced workers are more indebted economically in their life than others and a significant value of less than .05 means that there is significant difference in the indebtedness of experienced and less experienced workers in their life. As the significance value MANOVA is less than .05 it can be concluded that the differences between the means are statistically significant.

Null Hypothesis rejected.

Result: There is significant difference in the level of economic status between experienced and fresh workers.

**6. Impact of Cashew Crisis on the Socio-Economic Life**

**Table 6:** Impact on Social Life of Workers

| Sl. No. | Factors          | High | No Change | Low | Remarks   |
|---------|------------------|------|-----------|-----|-----------|
| 1.      | Health           | 15   | 83        | 2   | No Change |
| 2.      | Social Relations | 7    | 16        | 77  | Low       |

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|----|---------------|---|----|----|-----------|
| 3. | Participation | 5 | 12 | 83 | Low       |
| 4. | Safety        | 2 | 93 | 5  | No Change |
| 5. | Happiness     | 9 | 26 | 65 | Low       |
| 6. | Confidence    | 0 | 8  | 92 | Low       |

Table 6 gives the difference in the social factors of their life both pre and post layoff and closure of the units. While 83 respondents didn't see any change in their medical expenses 15 of them have to spend more on medical items post the layoff. Among the participants 77 workers felt that their layoff have affected their social relations 83 of them reported a low participation in the family matters. Regarding the safety aspect 93 of them didn't see any difference. When 65 among the workers opine that their happiness declined post lay off 92 of them feel less confident in the period of unstable employment and frequent layoffs.

**Table 7: Impact on Economic Life of Workers**

| Sl. No. | Factors      | High | No Change | Low | Remarks   |
|---------|--------------|------|-----------|-----|-----------|
| 1.      | Housing      | 1    | 97        | 2   | No Change |
| 2.      | Medical Care | 9    | 89        | 2   | No Change |
| 3.      | Education    | 0    | 35        | 65  | Low       |
| 4.      | Savings      | 0    | 1         | 99  | Low       |
| 5.      | Food Choice  | 0    | 2         | 98  | Low       |
| 6.      | Debt         | 79   | 17        | 4   | High      |

From the Table 7 it can be seen that 97 of the respondents didn't see any change in the housing during unstable employment, 89 among them do not feel any change in the medical care they received during and after their peak employment period. Regarding the amount spend on education of family members 65 of the respondents feel that they contribute less during these tough times. Overwhelming number 99 participants found their savings going low and dry during the period of frequent layoffs. Food choice of the workers reduced to a greater extent as reported by 98 participants. Debt of the workers increased as reported by 79 participants.

### 7. Conclusion

Once flourishing cashew processing units in Kollam is now facing severe crisis on the wake of various endogenous and exogenous factors. As a result it has affected the livelihood of many women workers who found employment in the sector. This study was focused on the impact of the crisis on the social and economical life of the workers who are partially employed now. The study has found that there is significant difference in the level of social status between experienced and less experienced cashew workers. There is also significant difference in the level of social status between experienced and less experienced cashew workers. Regarding the impact on the social status of the workers it has been found that it has negatively affected the social relations, social participation, overall happiness and the confidence of the workers. On the economic life of the workers it has changed the amount of contribution of the workers towards the education of family members, it has reduced the savings, it has limited the food choice of the workers and increased the debt of the workers. So it can be concluded that the current crisis has severely changed the social and economic life of the women workers of the cashew processing industry in Kollam.

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