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## Socio Economic Condition of Tea Garden Workers and Its Impact on Women's Health, with Special Reference to Teok Tea Estate

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### **Abstract:**

*Tea garden labourers are considered as remarkable labour force in Assam. But their socio economic condition is not satisfied. They have less access to education also. For poor socio economic background women have to engage in various risk factored works and it effects on their health. So in this paper the researcher tends to study about the socio economic condition of the Teok Tea Estate and its impact on their health.*

**Keywords:** Women worker, health, socio economic condition, risk factor.

### **1. Introduction**

India is experiencing health transition, which is posing a great challenge to its health system due to the changing health needs of the population. Various socio demographic factors, nutritional improvements, improvement in health infrastructures including education, elimination and major control of diseases are mainly contributing to the changing disease pattern in India. However, among the socio economic group, the pace of epidemiological transition is slow, where communicable diseases and under nutrition is still major cause of disease burden.<sup>1</sup> Libon (1973) observes that health is not only the result of interaction between an individual's heredity contribution with his or her natural and cultural environment, but it is also largely determined by the biological and cultural adaptation and evolution of the society and population.<sup>2</sup> The social and cultural elements as a whole do influence the health of a community both positively and negatively. The social scientists and medical practitioners lately realised that there is a close relationship between health problems on the one hand, and socio cultural and economic factors on the other hand. Besides tradition; living condition, poverty, illiteracy and ignorance etc also contribute women's enhanced fertility, mortality, morbidity, and the very important parameters in assessing the health status of a community.<sup>3</sup>

The lived experience of women in India is replete with potential risk factor that has implications for their lives and well being. The multiple roles of household work, child rearing and paid work that women carry out has implications for their mental and physical health. There may be gendered risk to women's lives in the home Environment. In India, a vast majority of household rely on bio fuels (wood, dung etc) for cooking. It effects on their heart respiratory tract infections, blindness, and asthma.<sup>4</sup> Women's life is biologically and socially different than men they at a greater risk of nutritional deficiencies. Besides work at home, women have to work in agriculture and other sector. On the consequences, they compromise on timings, quality and quantity of meals leading to malnutrition. Large numbers of women are seen suffering from iron deficiency anaemia.<sup>5</sup>

Tea is an important agro based industry of Assam, which contributes immensely to the state's economy. Tea garden population constitutes approximately  $\frac{1}{5}$  of state's population. Poor socio economic conditions ignorance due to illiteracy, overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions in the residential colonies make tea garden population vulnerable to various communicable diseases and malnutrition.<sup>6</sup> They are poor in health, education medical facility and face poor socio economic condition. About half of the workforce comprises women whose nimble fingers are considered better plucking, pruning, Khulni (cutting dead wood), thalli (weeding) etc. Women workers are paid less than men and get less maternity benefit. In a tea plantation there are basically two types of activity such as the activities related to growing and collection of tea leaves another is connected to the processing of tea leaves. Womenfolk are better suited to plucking or collection of tea leaves and hence women are engaged in more number of plucking. Generally, the male members work in the factory. Sometimes the female labourers are engaged for carrying the leaves from one place to another, and also help the male labourers in packing the leaf in chests.<sup>7</sup> The most of the workers are unskilled workers. They are poor in health, education, and medical facility and poor in socio economic condition. Social life, marital status, education are important variable of determination of social life; information regarding the education attainment as well as believes, customs are included to understand the social life. The economic life includes the economic activities associated with the fulfilment of material needs of the people. The economic condition of the people determines their overall standard of living, which in turn is reflected in their health condition.<sup>8</sup> Their socio economic condition effects on women's health also. Women belonging to the schedule caste and scheduled tribe are more likely to suffer from moderate and severe anaemia. Depending on the nutrient in equation, nutritional deficiency can manifest in an array of disorders like protein energy malnutrition, night blindness, iodine deficiency disorder, anaemia, stunting, low body mass

index and low birth weight. Types of morbidity experienced by women included reproductive problems, aches, pain and injuries, weakness, fever, respiratory problem, problems in gastro intestinal tract, skin, eye and ear problems and residual category of other problems. Teagarden women workers are mostly illiterate and they are not aware of the minimum standard of living. Prejudice, superstitious beliefs, alcoholism etc. are high among this underdeveloped community.<sup>9</sup>As socio economic condition is related to health of the people, so In this paper the researcher tends to study about the socio economic condition of the tea garden workers, specially the women and its impacts on their health in the Teok Tea Estate.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

- i. The objective of this study is to examine the socio economic condition and its impact on women's health in Teok Tea Estate.
- ii. To study about the risk factors at work (economic activity) on health associated to tea garden women of Teok tea estate.

## 3. Methodology

This paper is prepared on the basis of both primary and secondary source. Secondary source has been taken from various books, journals, online articles etc. Primary data has been collected through observing the actual field and from local dispensary. In terms of technique of data collection, the researcher has adopted the method of observation and questioner method. In terms of sampling, researcher has used random sampling method. In Teok Tea Estate there are 280 women workers. Among them the researcher has taken sample of 80.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

The age of the respondents at Teok tea Estate area lies between 20 to 50.

Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage
20-30	35	37.5%
30-40	25	31%
40-50	20	25%

Table 1

Among the respondents 37.5 % women are of the age of 20 to 30; 31% women are between age of 30 to 40 and 20% women lies between the ages of 40 to 50.

Among those women labourers different mode of workers were found such as

Mode of Works	No of Respondents	Percentage
Tea garden worker	50	62.5%
Agricultural labourer	20	25%
Housewife(only)	10	12.5%

Table 2

It has been seen that 62.5% women works at tea garden. They are serving as permanent and temporary labourer. Some of the temporary labourer engages in agricultural works, other industries like bricklin etc. 25% women work only at agricultural field in seasonal time. They have the burden of household activity also.12.5 % women were found to do only the household activity.

Income of the respondents:

Income	No of Respondents	Percentage
3000-5000	40	50%
2000-3000	30	37.5 %

Table 3

It was seen that out of 80 respondents 70 women were income earner. But it was seen that they are not independent or they do not spend money as their own will. It was found that for poor economic condition they have to contribute it for the entire family. In terms of control over women's income it was seen that only 29% women have their control over their income. Other 71% women do not have the control over the same. They can't fill up their own necessities through it. On the other hand, most of the husbands of them work as wage earner at tea garden, other factory and in agricultural fields.

Educational qualification of the respondents:

Educational Qualification	No of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	7	8.5 %
Under matriculate	25	31%
Matriculate	25	31%
Undergraduate	20	25%
Graduate	3	3.8%
Post graduate	0	0%

Table 4

Among the respondents women 8.5% women were found totally illiterate, 31% women were under matriculate, 31% were matriculate, 25% women were undergraduate, 3.8% were graduate. No women were found having post graduate degree. From the survey it was found that the educational qualifications of the women respondents are not so good.

Medical facilities: it was found from the survey that though there is a medical dispensary, but there is lack of proper facility of health treatment. The medicine provided through it is not so much effective to people. In terms of medical practices, most of the people approach to doctor only, some of them approach to the hospital outside tea garden. But the believes on supernatural power on disease cannot be ignored among some of them.

Housing and other sanitary facility: In spite of the provision for housing as well as sanitary facility made by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, in the practical field it was observed that there is the lack of hygienic environment. There is the co existence of the people with animals. Water facility is not so good. It is not filtered. It was observed that they even now use open sanitary system.

Social problem: the most remarkable social problem faced by the Teok Tea garden labourer is the problem of alcoholism which has bad impacts in various ways. In was found from his frequent observation that approximately 95% women have to suffer this problem for the alcoholic habit of their husband.

Health status of the Teok Tea garden women worker: The outer image of all the respondent women seemed to be thin, underweight. As they have to do hard works, but they do not get healthy food in time. From the medical report of women respondents, it was found that 73% women respondents suffer from the problem of anaemia. The health problems faced by the women respondents directly affected by their work pattern at tea garden are-

Types of works	No of respondents(out of 50)	Percentage	Health problem
Plucking , carrying tea leaves	40	80%	Finger pain
	35	70%	Body pain
	50	100%	thinness

Table 5

For the hard works at Tea Garden, women have to face such health problems. In spite of such health problems, they have to do their duty for their survival.

The chronic diseases suffered by the respondents was seen such

Chronic diseases	No of respondents/percentage	Age
Respiratory problem	30/ 37%	40-50
Skin disease	20/ 25%	20-50
Weakness	20 /25%	30-50
Blindness	4 / 5%	40-50
Ear problem	1/ 1.2%	40-50

Table 6

From the medical officer and the conversation with the women it was found that there is the relationship between their works and their health issue. Because most of the women use wood (fuel) for cooking. It was also observed that among 80 respondents, 60 women use wood fuel for cooking. Among them most of the women, 37 % women suffer the problem of respiratory. Again as they have to work day long in sunshine, it effects on their skin. So it was observed that 25% suffer from skin problem. Their food habit also has impact on their health. It was found from the frequent observation that women specially working at Teok Tea Garden that They have not the conscious about their food or they don't have better chance to eat in proper time or proper way. Food habit or food pattern was seen among the respondents such way

Breakfast	No of respondents	Timing
	30	Regularly
	50	Not regularly

Table 7

Mode of breakfast, lunch of the women workers was such as

Breakfast	Pattern of taking food	No of respondents/ percentage
	Biscuits with salt tea	40 / 50 %
Lunch	Chapatti with salt tea	20/ 25%
	Rice with salt tea	20/ 25%
	Rice with salt/salt tea	40/ 50%
	Rice with dal	20/ 25%
	Rice with dal/vegetable	20/ 25%

Table 8

It was seen that salt tea was like an important part of their food item. From the table it is seen that almost 50% women workers have to have very low quality food. It is for their lack of consciousness also and for poor economic background also. So among them approximately 35% women have suffered the problem of weakness between the age of 30-50. They don't get proper nutrition compared to their hard works. Though they are provided rice, daal, flour of wheat etc, but it is not sufficient for survival of the large number of people in a household.

From the medical investigation, last two year's records of diseases suffered by women at Teok Tea Estate are as below

Category of disease	No of respondents	percentage
Diarrhoea	30	37.5 %
Malaria	20	25 %
Typhoid	10	12.5%
Cholera	5	6.25%

Table 9

It was seen that the above respondents have suffered those diseases basically due to their improper watering facility. According to the medical officer of the local dispensary, the diseases like dysentery and the above diseases are being suffered by women due to the water borne infection or water based infections. It is directly impacted by the lack of safe drinking water and good sanitary system. The drainage system is seemed very worse.

During the observation it was observed that 16 women worked in plucking tea leaves, carrying etc. But their nutrition is not so good. From the report of the Local Dispensary it was known that 6 maternal mortalities were taken place in the Teok Tea estate.

In the frequent observation it was seen that most of the women in that garden have to be the victim of domestic violence which has the impact on their mental and physical health. As they are less educated, so they are less conscious about their health also. But in this context we could see the gender issue in using contraceptive as the preventive measure for birth control which has negative impact on their health. In the survey among 80 respondents, 70 were married. Among them 10 women were newly married women. But others have spontaneously speak about the same.

The principal risk factors associated to the health of Teok Tea Garden can be summarised such way-

Diseases	Principal risk factor
Diarrhoea/Dysentery	Sanitation , water supply hygiene, low quality food, water etc.
Respiratory infection	Poor housing, intensive indoor smoke, dust at work field, livestock in the house.
Malaria	Poor drainage and sanitation.

Table 10

Linkage between women's work and health of the Teok tea garden:

Women's work	Risk factor	illness
Household work	Heavy work load, tobacco, low nutritional status	Respiratory problem, digestive problem, weakness.
Fetching water/fuel	Carrying heavy load, even during pregnancy	Body ache, ache in limbs, waist etc.
Tea garden work	Cutting of tree, plucking and carrying of tea leaves, exposure to sunshine	Pain in body, injury on fingers, skin diseases.
Agricultural works	Heavy workload, exposure to sunshine, hazardous chemical	Caught, body ache, skin irritation, body pain etc
Non agricultural/construction	Heavy load on body, chemical, dust, unsafe noise level	Pain on body, respiratory problem, health problem of pregnant mother and child.

Table 11

From the table it has been seen that for the economic condition they have to engage in such risky works. But apart from that in terms of sanitation, it was observed that most of the women as well as their entire family even do not use soap regularly. So the health situation has been emerged by their own negligence also.

## 5. Conclusion

From the study it has been seen that the labourer of Teok tea garden are living in a very poor socio economic condition. Some of the women were seen that though they have a little bit of consciousness, but their economic condition force to do the works which are risky to their health. There is a light of hope that they are entering to the present medical practices as they don't have so much believes in *Jora fuka*. They immunize their children time to time. In such aspects, they have got some kind of consciousness. Poor socio economic background, women have to face lack of proper food and nutrition. On the other hand, for the lack of education, they are not

aware about the governmental scheme or the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 etc. So they are facing the problems of housing facility, proper sanitation, proper drainage system which are very risk factors to the health. But it can be concluded that for their better condition of health, women have to be more conscious.

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